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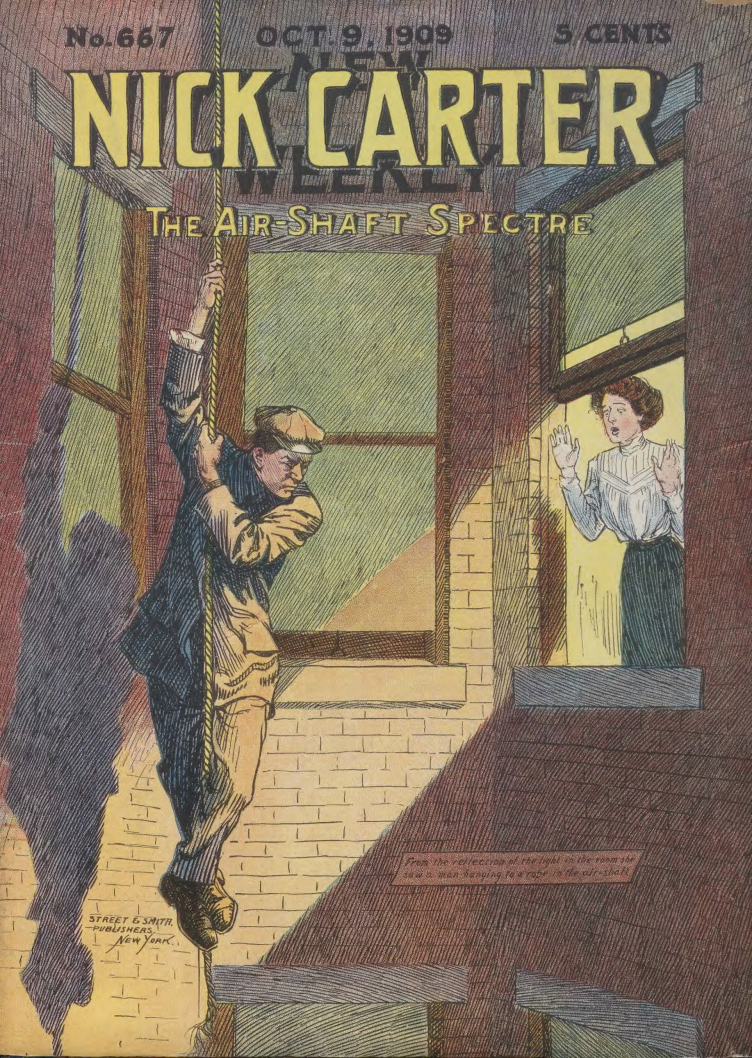
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE AIR-SHAFT SPECTRE


From the reflection of the light in the room she saw a man hanging by a rope in the air-shaft.
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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Airshaft Spectre

OR,

NICK CARTER'S SHREWD SURMISE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A VILLAIN BROUGHT TO BOOK.

"Send for the surgeon," said Nick Carter, "and get him here as soon as you can. If Bob Spale escapes us again, it will be by the door of the morgue."

"Is he as badly hurt as that, Nick?" queried his chief assistant, Chick, leaning over Nick Carter's shoulder, and looking at the man who lay upon the cellar floor, his life flowing sluggishly from a bullet wound in his chest.

It was a grim scene, lighted by the flaring flame of a single gas jet; and the sub-cellar of the big apartment house looked as grewsome at that moment as though it were a portion of some ancient catacomb.

There were present several police officers—the reserves of a Harlem station who had been called upon by Nick Carter in the final round-up and arrest of one of the most bloodthirsty men it had ever been the detective's fate to pursue.

The house had been surrounded, the officers, with Nick and his three assistants, Chick Carter, Patsy Garvan, and young Danny, the chauffeur, had entered by the various entrances, arrested the janitor of the building, who had been hiding Bob Spale, and finally had chased the latter into the deep cellar of the building.

There the man had turned at bay and had fought the whole crowd with the courage of a wildcat. He had been aided by a most strange companion—a giant orang-outang—a man-ape from Borneo, which was Bob Spale's property, and which the man had shown a strange fondness for. Chick had shot the huge monkey as it sprang upon Nick Carter; and one of the policemen had seriously wounded Bob Spale himself.

Already one of the officers had hurried away to send in a call for the ambulance, but Nick Carter determined that the case was so serious that it would be dangerous to wait for the hospital surgeon to come.

"Isn't there a surgeon near here?" he asked. "The man's lifeblood is flowing away, and it is not a wound that can be stopped easily."

"There's Doc Beebee around the corner!" squealed a voice from the top of the cellar stairs. "Poor old Bob! He ain't got to croak, has he?"

The voice was that of the janitor of the house whom Nick Carter had first arrested—a fellow called "Whittling Johnny" who had long been a well-known character along the East River docks, but who had only lately become janitor of this big flat house in the very respectable upper East Side neighborhood. Whittling Johnny had been about the only friend the wounded Bob Spale had, and he had served him with the faithfulness of a dog.

"Get this Beebee, Danny!" ordered Nick quickly. "Come, boys; raise him easily. We must take him upstairs into the janitor's rooms, and find a couch for him. This is a bad case. Assassin though he is, it seems terrible that he should be stricken down so suddenly."

Bob Spale was unconscious. When they tried to move him the fierce creature that had fought for him—the orang-outang—struggled desperately to go to its

master's aid, and screamed like a woman in distress. The police had to bind its arms and legs, and had some difficulty in doing this without being bitten.

"We'd better rap it in the head and finish it. That's a bad wound in its shoulder," said the lieutenant in charge of the squad of reserves.

"That is a very vaulable animal," advised Nick. "It would be much better to have the doctor treat the wound, if he will. Then the creature can be removed to the animal hospital at Bronx Park. There will be an inquiry made for the beast," he added warningly.

Still, Nick Carter had no cause to be lenient with the orang-outang or his master. The beast had battled with Nick for his life—a struggle that the detective would remember to his dying day. And Bob Spale himself was not a man to invite much sympathy.

In the first place, his crime had been a most atrocious one. He had strangled his nephew, Herman Spale, in an automobile in Westchester, had fastened the dead man under the steering wheel of the car, and had then set the car to run to the bottom of a steep hill and be wrecked, so as to hide the fact that the man in the car had been first choked to death.

That he had had some reason for feeling this hatred toward Herman Spale, it was admitted. Herman had secured to himself both the fortune which had been his own father's and the estate left by Daniel Spale, an old-time saloon keeper on Greenwich Street, in the Ninth Ward, who was Bob's own father.

Bob had been admittedly the black sheep of the Spale family. But his father's harsh treatment had been the first cause of his running away from home. He had made his home on the East Side docks while a boy, and had got into all manner of trouble before he was twenty years of age. He had even led a party of burglars to his father's saloon and aided them in robbing the place.

For this Dan Spale, who was a rough and tough old fellow, caught his son and beat him most unmercifully. The boy had gone to the hospital to be treated for his wounds, and had not been out for weeks. Then he had been befriended by the family of a boy chum.

This boy chum had grown up to be a ne'er-do-well along the water front, known as Whittling Johnny, and he, with his crippled sister, Belle, were the only ones Bob Spale had revealed himself to on his return to New York, after twenty-five years of wandering in the wild countries of the earth.

Meanwhile the entire Spale family had died off, saving Herman. Herman had even spread the report that Bob had been drowned off a dock, and a body had been buried as Bob's, though not in the Spale family lot.

Nor had Herman told his own father that Bob was dead. That old gentleman had always been tender-hearted toward the black sheep of the family, and had promised him, as a boy, that if his own father did not do right by him, *he* should remember him in his will.

In his will he did not mention the name of Bob Spale, but he *did* mention a secret trust to his son, Herman, instructions regarding which were left in a sealed packet in the hands of his lawyer, Mr. Alfred Meyer, to be called for by Herman, and executed as agreed upon between the testator and the executor.

What this secret trust was, nobody knew. The lawyer did not know, and Herman Spale had never revealed it to a soul before his death. He had carefully willed all the great estate which had come to him from both branches of the family to two educational institutions, and that will could not be broken by the claimant, Bob. Nor could Bob hope to break the will made by his own father, originally leaving *his* property to Herman.

The one hope had been that secret trust mentioned in the will of Herman's father. But Herman had denied it had anything to do with Bob, and finally, after hanging about New York for five years or so, Bob had laid the plot which resulted in Herman's death.

With the nephew out of the way, Bob Spale had undoubtedly hoped to get his case into court and secure some share of the Spale estate. And this attempt was to be made by Bob's lawyer, a scaly limb of the law named Emanuel Finowitz.

The plan might have resulted successfully for Bob—at least, his crime of strangling his nephew might not have been discovered—had Nick Carter not been motoring over that particular Westchester road on the day when the auto, with Herman Spale in it, was wrecked.

Nick saw the face of the man under the wheel as the car raced down the steep hillside to its doom at the bottom; and he knew that it was a dead man in the car!

Taking up the case because of his personal interest in it, rather than any hope of reward, Nick had brought the crime home to Bob Spale, and he was arrested. By the aid of Whittling Johnny and his sister, the lame woman, Belle, Spale was enabled to escape from the Tombs prison, before he was tried. Mr. Alfred Meyer, the legal representative of the Spale estate, had engaged Nick not only to rearrest Bob, but to learn the mystery which seemed to shroud the life of the assassin.

These two things had been accomplished on the day when Bob had been brought to bay in the cellar of the Harlem apartment house. Through Belle, the cripple, who had been promised the freedom of her brother, a pretty complete story of Bob Spale's wonderful life had been gained by Adelina, Patsy Garvan's wife, and one of Nick Carter's valued assistants.

Bob was a circus acrobat, had been an animal tamer and trainer, and had actually lived in the heart of the island of Borneo with the big apes, one of which he now carried about with him wherever he went. Indeed, Bob was as savage and as fierce in his anger as an ourang himself, and there was a strange affinity of feeling between this great man-monkey that had been wounded in the cellar and himself.

The great ape was shut up in one of the coal bins, and Bob Spale, by Nick's directions, carried upstairs and laid upon a bed in the janitor's basement flat. Nick

had scarcely cleared the rooms of most of the officers, when Danny returned with Dr. Beebee.

The latter was a sharp-eyed, black-browed man, with a sallow face and long, almost prehensile hands. Such nervous, dexterous hands Nick Carter had never seen. Then seemed marvelously adapted to the surgeon's practice.

Dr. Beebee was not a pleasant-looking man, and in some lights his sharp eyes glinted green as an emerald. He was thin-lipped, closely shaven, and evidently interested only in his profession and the task before him.

"Is that the man?" he said, quickly stepping to the bedside. "Was he moved to this place?"

"He was," admitted Nick. "He was shot in the cellar."

"Why didn't you kill him outright, instead of moving him?" croaked the surgeon, but going to work very quickly to stanch the flow of blood from the punctured lung. "You might as well."

"He'll have to be moved farther than *that,*" grunted the police lieutenant.

"Not with *my* permission he won't!" ejaculated the surgeon angrily.

"Well, say! The guy's under arrest. He's wanted for murder and for breaking jail already——"

"I don't care what he's wanted for!" snapped Dr. Beebee. "He will not be moved from this bed with my permission; and if he *is* moved, I guarantee he is dead before you get him to the ambulance."

The gong of the ambulance sounded as he spoke, and in a moment a white-suited young hospital surgeon appeared. He evidently knew Dr. Beebee, and respected his opinion.

"Is it a bad case, doctor?" he asked.

"About as bad as it can be made by the interference of these uniformed meddlers," growled Dr. Beebee, nodding toward the policemen. "Wonder the man has not bled to death."

"Better not move him, then?" queried the hospital surgeon.

"*You* needn't move him!" snapped Beebee. "If he's to be moved they'd better send the dead wagon."

"Oh!"

"See here," commanded Beebee, and when the younger surgeon approached he instructed him as to the serious situation of the wound and the state the man was in. The hospital surgeon quickly agreed with Beebee that it would be dangerous to move Bob Spale from the bed on which he lay.

"I'd like to strap him here to make sure he did not move an inch," declared Beebee. "With my permission the police shall not take him away."

CHAPTER II.

DR. BEEBEE'S INTEREST INCREASES.

"That's the way it is with these medical sharps," whispered the lieutenant of police to Nick Carter. "One will always back up the other. You couldn't get that hospital guy to say anything different *now.* That's to prove how exact their science is—an', by jove! some feller or other once said that *all* science is merely a series of shrewd guesses!"

"I've heard this statement myself," said Nick, smiling; "but I am not, as yet, willing to subscribe to it. Perhaps it is not well to move the man."

"Huh! if we'd shot him into the ambulance and started him for the hospital on the jump, an' he *had* croaked, how much worse off would he have been?" demanded the officer. "And the county saved a good round sum into the bargain. One of these murder trials costs a pile of money, Carter."

"Your statement is incontestible," admitted Nick. "Now, lieutenant, this matter is up to you, it seems. I am not officially connected with this case, you know. You have made the arrest and must place a man here to guard the prisoner, as long as the surgeon says he may not be moved. As far as this janitor goes, *he* is a fool, not a knave, and I claim him as *my* meat."

"Isn't he supposed to have aided in Spale's break from the Tombs?" queried the officer doubtfully.

"He may have given Spale shelter. But he was not seen about the prison. His sister, who does not seem to be here, is the person accused of giving the prisoner the cords used by him in his escape and in garroting the guard."

"Oh, well; he does not come under *my* jurisdiction, I guess," admitted the lieutenant. "Have your own way with him, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you, lieutenant."

When they went back into the janitor's flat they found one policeman on guard at the door. The ambulance surgeon had gone, and Whittling Johnny was in attendance on Dr. Beebee as he bandaged the wounded man.

"Oh, gents, you won't take me away from him, will yer?" cried Whittling Johnny, tears standing in his bleared eyes. "Ye see, he an' I knowed each other when we was kids. An' dere ain't a soul would do a hand's toin fer him but *me.*"

"I'll see about that," began Nick Carter, not unkindly, when Doctor Beebee broke in brusquely, with: "*I'll* have a word to say about it, I guess. I want this man to attend on his friend until a proper nurse can be secured. The man must have constant attendance."

"You are inclined to be a little dominating in your requests, are you not, doctor?" suggested Nick Carter quietly.

"Who are *you?*" demanded the surgeon, wiping his hands and staring steadily at the great detective.

Nick told him, but the black-browed professional man took the information with a sniff.

"I don't care who you are," he said. "My orders *go* here. I brook no interference by either the police or by private inquiry officers. Make the best of *that!*"

"I hope," said Nick, smiling, without showing the least offense, "that you are as good a surgeon as you are a failure as a gentleman. And I want to call your

attention to another case that might be the better for your skill."

"What's that?" demanded the physician, without paying any attention to the remainder of Nick's remark.

"There is another creature wounded in the cellar."

"Let's see him," remarked Beebee briskly.

"It may be a trifle out of your line, doctor. We might better send for a veterinary."

"Is it a dog? I treat dogs—both four-legged and two," snapped the surgeon.

"This is a monkey," explained Nick quietly, enjoying the joke he thought he was perpetrating on the old surgeon.

"Heh? a monkey?"

"In fact, a man-ape. An orang-outang that was this man's especial pet"—and Nick nodded at the wounded man on the bed.

"What's this?" cried Dr. Beebee, all eagerness, and his sallow face flushing. "An ourang? Why did you not tell me at first? Is he badly wounded? Where is he?"

"You seem more interested in the monkey than in the man, doctor," chuckled Nick.

"Humph! A monster ape is much more interesting than a mere man, Mr. Detective!" declared the surgeon. "Let me see it at once."

"Come downstairs. Perhaps you may do something for him, but he is mighty savage," said Nick.

"Let me tell you, sir, that men are plentiful enough in this world," growled the surgeon, following the detective into the cellar. "But orang-outangs are not so common—not in New York City. The beast must have cost a pile of money. I've often desired to possess one of the larger apes to experiment upon."

"I reckon," smiled Nick, "that you are not opposed to vivisection."

"You don't want to let your imagination run away with you, Mr. Detective," snapped Dr. Beebee.

There was an officer down in the cellar, watching the monkey in the coal bin. Bob Spale had made a heavy slat door to the bin before he had been arrested, and they could see the wounded beast lying in a corner, on some excelsior, and it was moaning much as a human being might in distress.

"Say!" said the cop hoarsely, "I'm thinkin' I'm at a wake with that critter keenin' in there like an old woman. Ain't I goin' to get relieved on this?"

"I'll see if I can relieve the ape first," said the doctor promptly. "Go in and bring him out."

"Not on your life!" cried the policeman, backing away. "I got a family an' frien's that love me dear—as the song says. Nix fer mish!"

"Mr. Detective, just show this fellow that the beast is perfectly harmless, will you?" demanded the surgeon.

"My personal belief, doctor, is that a good ourang is as hard to find as a good Indian. They are usually found *dead*. This individual in the coal bin has shown a particular dislike to me."

"But you say he is wounded?"

"Nevertheless, he is not dead," declared Nick. "I admit I am with the officer in his finely expressed sentiments."

The doctor muttered something which was complimentary neither to the detective nor to he of the uniformed force, and walked promptly to the door of the coal bin.

"Turn up that gas, will you," he said. "I must have more light here."

The man-monkey moved and chattered its teeth as the doctor flung open the door.

"Have a care, there, doc!" called the officer.

But Dr. Beebee gave no heed, and entered the place. Nick drew nearer, ready to leap to the medical man's assistance; but to his surprise the ourang made no threatening motion.

"What's this?" cried Dr. Beebee. "You've got him trussed up like a chicken for the spit! And nothing has been done to stop the flow of blood. He has lost a lot. Not from an artery, however. *He'll* pull through," he added, with satisfaction.

He deliberately cut the monkey's bonds, raised him to his feet, and led him out into the open cellar. The beast seemed to realize that the medical man was friendly toward him. He sat down in the chair Dr. Beebee pushed him into, and allowed the man to make a thorough examination of the bullet wound in his shoulder, even to the probing of the same for the ball.

"A very clean wound," declared Beebee. "The ball chipped the shoulder bone; but I believe the injury will not be permanent. And what a wonderfully interesting specimen he is! I see he doesn't like you, Mr. Detective," he added, as the beast showed its teeth to Nick.

"The dislike is mutual," admitted Carter.

"This fellow must be brought upstairs and given some sort of a bed in one of the rooms there. He must be kept quiet, too," said Doctor Beebee.

"Gee! I hope my relief comes soon," muttered the policeman.

The physician made the man give him a hand, and together they helped the ourang up to the janitor's flat. There was a small room there with a cot in it, and Beebee insisted that the man-monkey should have his quarters in that room. Its only window was into the air shaft that ran up through the centre of the house, and the door could be safely locked. Indeed, the medical man showed even more interest in the case of the ape than he had in that of Bob Spale himself!

The police, up to a certain degree, had to obey his orders. Two officers were left on guard, and arrangements would be made at the station to relieve them at regular intervals. Meanwhile Nick agreed to let Whittling Johnny stay with the wounded man until some better nurse could be provided.

"Your sister is under my care," Nick told the water rat quietly. "Of course, you do not want to get her into trouble, or tumble deeper into the mire yourself? Well, I'll hold her as a hostage for your good

behavior. Remember, they have something against her down at the Tombs."

"Oh, I won't play no tricks, boss," declared Johnny. "Jest you lemme take keer of Bob till he croaks. He's sure goin' to go this time!"

"He will either go to the morgue or to the electric chair," admitted Nick, with a grim nod.

He went out with the doctor, who devoted his last lingering glance to the man-monkey.

"A wonderful creature," said Beebee enthusiastically. "If it dies I hope to encourage its owner to give the body to me—or sell it to me. I have always wished for such a specimen."

Nick separated from the surgeon on the steps of the house, and went away, quietly smiling to himself over the medical man's enthusiasm about the ourang. Had he suspected for a moment what strange circumstances would lead out of that desire of Dr. Beebee, Nick Carter would have made his subsequent course entirely different from what it really was.

With the arrest of Bob Spale, his active interest in the case really seemed closed. The regular police had the assassin in charge; all Nick had to do was to make his private report to Mr. Alfred Meyer, the attorney for the Spale estate, regarding the knowledge he had gleaned about the previous existence of Bob Spale.

Nick was busy with several other matters at the same time, and so were Chick and Patsy. Nick allowed Adelina to do as she pleased with Belle, the lame sister of Whittling Johnny, and he only inquired occasionally about the progress Bob Spale was making, and made sure that Whittling Johnny remained in attendance on him.

The agent of the premises where these above incidents had occurred would have been glad to get rid of the wounded man and the wounded monkey, for the thing got noised abroad, and two or three of his tenants moved, while people sometimes gathered in the street and talked about the man-ape being in the house.

The poor ape, however, did not seem to gain under Dr. Beebee's treatment, as did Bob Spale himself. After a fortnight it was reported that Bob might soon be moved to the jail hospital; but the man-monkey died.

"That doctor guy," reported Patsy, "has got a bill of sale of the monk, I understand, and is going to take it away to his laboratory. I wonder did he help the poor beast over the divide—heh?"

"You are a very suspicious young man," said Chick, chuckling.

"I personally do not care if he did," Nick admitted. "Although I fancy he would much rather have had the monkey alive than dead. Does he still attend on Bob and the monk?"

"The monk is dead, I tell you," said Patsy. "And Dr. Beebee made his last visit to Bob this morning. I heard him say he could not afford to waste his time longer on a man who was getting well as fast as Bob was."

"I understand that Beebee is something of a specialist and is in great demand," said Chick.

"He is a peculiar fellow," remarked Nick. Then he added this question: "Has the monkey been taken away from the place, yet, Patsy?"

"Yep. I saw it taken out in a bag. A couple of fellows came in a cab and took it."

"Was the doctor there?"

"No. They were the men the doctor sent, I suppose. At least, the cops who were on duty let the fellows have the body of the ape."

Nick was sitting at his desk, going over some papers in another case; now he suddenly dropped the papers and raised his head, looking directly at his young assistant, and with deeper interest than he had shown before.

"Repeat that, will you, Patsy?" he demanded.

And at the moment the telephone call beside him jangled insistently.

CHAPTER III.

SO DOES NICK CARTER'S.

Even while he spoke to Patsy, Nick had taken down the receiver, pulled the standard toward him, and put the receiver to his ear. It was late in the evening, and he was surprised that anybody should call him at that hour. He half expected to hear central say: "Excuse it, please!"

But, instead he heard a man's voice saying, and very anxiously and excitedly, too:

"Hullo! hullo! Why can't you get me that number, central?"

"Here's your party, sir!" snapped the girl.

"Hullo!" Nick broke in, with a suspicion of a chuckle in his voice, for he thought he recognized the man at the other end of the wire. "Whose cat is dead *now*, Mr. Meyer?"

"Is that Mither Carter?" cried the lawyer at the other end of the conection.

"It surely is."

"Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

"None other," said Nick, chuckling again.

"Say! I must have you come right over here, Mither Carter," cried the attorney for the Spale estate, who had a habit of lisping at times.

"But this is a pretty late hour to make a call——"

"I've positively *got* to see you!" interrupted Mr. Meyer, his voice actually cracking in his excitement.

"Can't you consult me over the telephone? They tell me it is raining outside——"

"I don't care! I don't care *what* you charge me for it, Mither Carter!" cried the lawyer. "You must come."

"Why, if it's a matter of life or death," said Nick slowly, when the other broke in again:

"Its worse, sir—worse than death! I am not a superstitious man nor am I a fool, I believe; but I have seen a ghost—a spectre—a disembodied spirit—whatever you have a mind to call such a spiritual manifes-

tation. Now, sir, don't laugh at me, but come over here at once. I never was more theriouth in my life, Mithter Carter—I never was."

Nick realized now that the dapper little lawyer was in earnest. Despite Mr. Alfred Meyer's lisp he was a most sane and sensible man. The lisp he usually reserved for social occasions; before a jury, or when talking business, Mr. Meyer spoke directly and to the point.

And by the tone of the lawyer's voice as it came to him over the wire, the detective knew that something out of the ordinary had served to startle him. Mr. Meyer was neither a spiritualist nor was he superstitious.

"There is something wrong over at Meyer's," Nick explained to his assistants. "Patsy, I wish you'd put on your coat and go with me. I may find it necessary to send you somewhere or other. Meyer isn't a man to make a mountain out of a molehill; and he certainly doesn't drink to excess. Yet he claims to have been seeing ghosts."

"It may be a real Irish banshee, Patsy, me bye!" exclaimed Chick, yawning. "You can capture it and bring it home for Adelina. "Who-oo! I'm going to bed."

"It's where I'd much prefer to be myself," said Nick, ready to go out. "I hope the mystery will pay me for losing my beauty sleep," and he laughed.

Patsy was waiting for him in the hall, and they went out into the rain, the younger man holding an umbrella over his chief's head. The distance to Alfred Meyer's house was so short that it would not have paid to telephone for a cab, although the storm drove hard against them and the gutters were rivers of muddy water.

The lawyer resided in one of those enormous apartment hotels near Broadway, in which one can obtain all the benefits of a modern hotel without its noise and confusion. There was a café and dining room on the street floor, and the main office, out of which several elevators rose to the tenth story, on which Mr. Meyer resided, was directly under the hotel roof.

Nick left his companion in the office, and after the night clerk had rung up the lawyer, and repeated Nick's name into the telephone, the detective was allowed to enter one of the elevators—the only one, in fact, running at that hour.

A hall boy had called the elevator from the basement, when Nick had come to the desk, and the boy running the lift and the one who had called him were talking in low tones as the detective stepped into the car.

The hall boy was as black as ebony, and his eyes sparkled angrily as he muttered to the lighter-colored youth who ran the elevator. What he said did not impress Nick much at the time; but later he remembered it.

"You gotter split it up with me, kid—an' yer gotter split it eben! If yer doesn't, I'll blow de hull t'ing—dat's wot I'll do."

The mulatto boy who shot the car upward looked scared, but he said nothing in reply to his ebony brother. Nick got out at the tenth floor, knowing very well which was the apartment of the lawyer. When he rang Mr. Meyer came himself to the door, and the moment he saw who his visitor was, he shook Nick heartily by the hand, exclaiming:

"Thank Heaven, you have come!"

"That really sounds melodramatic, Mr. Meyer," returned the detective, laughing. "What does it mean? You are not given to the highly spiced in conversation."

The dapper little lawyer, who was dyed, and painted, and powdered like an old-time French beau, did not take offense at the remark, but merely shook his head and trotted before Nick into his study.

"Come in here and let me tell you!" he gasped. "I am all alone. My man is out of town, and the maid and the cook have gone to some sort of a fandango of their own—a ball, or something."

"But you say you've had a spectral visitor," chuckled Nick.

"Do I look like a fool, Carter?" demanded Alfred Meyer.

Now, Nick's personal opinion was that any man who used rouge and dyed his mustache and hair certainly *looked* the fool; but he knew very well, from his dealings with the lawyer, that he was really anything but a "zany."

"I am quite aware that you are not a fool, Mr. Meyer," Nick said quietly.

"Then believe that I have good reason for what I said to you over the phone," declared the lawyer tartly.

"Let's hear about it," said Nick, sinking into a chair without further comment, seeing how irritated the little lawyer was.

"I *do* feel like a fool, telling you this," admitted Meyer, fiddling in his chair; "but it's just as real as anything that ever happened to me since I was born!"

"Skip the introduction and excuses," advised the detective. "I am here to listen."

The other grunted, rubbed his forehead as though to clear the brain behind it, and struck into his story with that directness that usually marked his speech:

"I sat here after dinner, when the girls had gone out, and I presume I nodded. I am addicted to a catnap after the evening meal. I was sitting in this chair I occupy now, facing my desk-table, and had placed some papers before me here, preparatory to doing some —er—extra work I had brought home from my office. Do you see the situation?"

"You were facing yonder doorway," said Nick. "Where does it lead to?"

"That is the passage on which open the bedrooms, and it also leads back to the kitchen and pantry."

"Continue," requested Nick, watching the lawyer keenly.

"Yes, I was facing that door. You see there is a heavy portière hanging there, and it was drawn just about as it is now. I declare I heard no sound, and

yet I began to feel a presence behind that curtain," declared the lawyer.

"Well?" asked Nick gravely.

"Then—actually, this is too strange for belief, yet it is *so*—I saw a mist at the gap between the edge of the curtain and the door jamb. It was just as though a foglike form was projected into the room, approaching me as I sat here. You see the distance is not great?"

"Between seven and eight feet," interposed Nick.

"Just about. You have a good eye, Mr. Carter. Now, don't mistake me; this was not a human form I saw—or thought I saw," proceeded Meyer. "As I remember it, it seemed at first like a bubble of mist. That sounds ridiculous, I know. But it seemed to be made of fine mist, and it was bubble, or globular, shaped. It projected itself into the room, growing larger and coming nearer to me, and I swear I could not move.

"Whether it was sleep that held me enthralled, or some mysterious power which emanated from the fog-spirit itself, I do not know. But I was absolutely helpless in my chair. I *did* strain to get out of it; perhaps not instantly, because of my surprise. But when I grew afraid and actually *fought* to spring to my feet, the mysterious power held me here. I lost consciousness. At the moment when my brain became blank it seemed to me as though this fog or mist enwrapped me about and I was being stifled by it. Now, Mr. Carter, what time is it?" asked Meyer abruptly.

Nick's glance flashed to the clock on the mantel, and he said:

"It is now a quarter to twelve o'clock."

"And how long ago did I call you over the 'phone?"

"I chanced to know that it was just eight minutes after eleven."

"Well, then, Mr. Carter, from a quarter past nine until this clock behind me struck the hour of eleven, everything in the world was a blank to me! I was as though drugged. I never slept so soundly in my chair in my life. And I came to myself, aroused, as it would seem, by the chime of the clock, to see quite as strange a manifestation as that which had cost me my senses an hour and three quarters before!"

"What was it?" queried Nick, vastly interested, but showing no visible emotion to his client.

"Why, as my eyes came open—and it was a struggle, it seemed, to open the lids—I saw the curtain in that doorway fluttering. Now, there was no draught—that I'll swear to. There could be no current of air through that hall to draw the curtain. I saw it move, however, and I will tell you what I did—what I really did, without knowing, at first, what I was doing.

"Naturally, I was confused. It seemed to me—so dead had been my slumber—that I had only just shut my eyes and opened them again. My last sane thought had been one of surprise regarding the mistlike form at the doorway; I connected the moving of the portière with that remembrance.

"So I leaped up, found myself dizzy and rather faint, but staggered to the door. There is a light in that hall, and my first dazed glance down its length revealed to me a figure—the figure—quite as vague and uncertain as it had seemed at first, disappearing around the turns in the hall—where the passage abuts into the kitchen.

"I admit, Mr. Carter, I was completely off my balance for the moment. I don't believe in ghost stories! I never placed credence in any spirit manifestation. But I swear I saw that moving, mistlike form on those two occasions.

"I suppose I wasted a minute—not more—in trying to adjust my mind to the fact that I had actually seen something moving down that hallway. Then I rushed to the kitchen to prove to myself that I was right. There was no other room for the apparition to go into. There was only the kitchen door into the hall for it to escape through, and that door is locked by an ordinary key, and the cook has it with her. I could not get out of that door myself to-night, without calling for a duplicate key at the office.

"But I tell you that I went to the kitchen, and there was not a thing disturbed, nor was there anything there. The only window in the kitchen is a broad, glazed one into an airshaft that runs through the centre of the building.

"That window was shut; the door between the public hall and the kitchen was locked. There was not an exit for any physical body. Indeed, I did not *see* any physical body. I merely saw a fog-shaped thing, and felt a presence. Now, Carter, what do you make out of such a ridiculous story as that?" queried Meyer, sitting back in his chair and eying the detective curiously.

"Did you not dream it?" was Nick's first remark.

"I did not," said Meyer firmly. "And that I will prove to you in a very few words. I am a methodical man. I told you what I was about to do when I sat down here after dinner. I had my evening's work planned out.

"When I found nobody in the kitchen I came back here, and I said to myself: 'I have been dreaming.' I said just what you say. But then," continued the lawyer, impressively, "I looked at the papers I had placed upon the table, and I saw, beyond any question or doubt, that those papers had been disturbed. Not one of them was laid as I had laid them. Some were opened and spread out, as though they had been read; while I, Mr. Carter, had not unfolded a single sheet before this mysterious apparition entered by that door!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEALED PACKET.

Nick Carter had naturally been exceedingly interested in the relation of these things, but there had been a doubt in his mind all the time as to whether Meyer really had been visited by a marauder—spiritual or otherwise. This final statement of the lawyer, however, seemed to settle the question.

There had actually been somebody in the apartments who had no business there!

Nick took no stock in the ghostly idea of the visit; but he took up the "mistlike" apparition first of all, nevertheless. As long as there had surely been a marauder, who had examined the lawyer's private papers, it was safe to put some confidence in the little man's power of observation.

Mr. Meyer had seen—so he said—a bubble-shaped form projected into the room from the hall beside his table. This cloud, or mist, finally enshrouded him, and he "went to sleep."

The suggestion to Nick's mind was obvious, but he refused at the moment to give the lawyer any opinion. First of all, he asked:

"Have you lost anything?"

"Money—valuables? No. I do not miss a thing," declared the lawyer.

"Papers?" asked Nick.

"They have been rummaged here, but that is all."

"Nothing missing from among them?"

"Positively no!"

"Then there is no immediate haste about this investigation. Let us go about it logically. First of all, Mr. Meyer, may I see your dressing room?"

"Why—certainly!" exclaimed the other, but evidently with surprise.

He led the way along the hall and opened a door. The room revealed when the electric light was snapped on might have been a fine lady's boudoir. It was hung in China silk, every appointment was of the most delicate kind, and there was a dressing table that would have delighted the heart of an actress!

Nick made no comment, nor did he even smile. He went to this dressing table directly and examined the scents, pastes, powders, and such folderols upon it—and there were a great profusion of such aids to the toilet.

The detective smelled of each carefully. Then he turned to the rather ruffled lawyer and asked:

"Are these all the preparations you commonly use, Mr. Meyer?"

"Sir!" ejaculated the lawyer, evidently considering that Nick was taking liberties which were inexcusable.

"I have an excellent reason for asking," said Nick, "and one which I will explain in a moment. And it is a necessary question if you would have me investigate this strange occurrence."

He said this so significantly that Meyer saw he meant to be answered. With a muttered ejaculation which certainly was uncomplimentary to the detective, the old beau opened the door leading into his bathroom; that was already illuminated, and there was a closet there which, when he threw open the door, seemed to be about filled with bottles, and pots, and such receptacles—a stock that would have filled the showcase of a perfumer!

"This is a lot of stuff that my man has gathered from Heaven alone knows where," said Meyer, trying to speak airily.

Nick counted no less than fifteen different "breeds" of hair restorer and hirsute dyes! There were any number of other messy concoctions—all revealing the fact that there is a fool born every minute!

But, to Meyer's evident surprise, Nick smelled of the contents of each of these receptables, as he had those displayed upon the dressing table in the other room. Then, silently, the detective led the way back to Mr. Meyer's study. There the little lawyer stared at him, scowling, while Nick snuffed the air like a hound trying to find an elusive scent.

"What, in Heaven's name, are you trying to do, Mr. Carter?" demanded Meyer tartly.

"Do you not distinguish a peculiar, though faint odor, like that emanating from the kernel of a crushed peach stone?" asked the detective. "I noticed it when first I entered your apartments, but I attributed it then to some article of the toilet that you had been using. I have not found, among the several things I have examined, anything with just that same odor. Indeed, even in this room, it is now grown much fainter than it was. In an hour from now the smell will likely be entirely gone. Now, Mr. Meyer," continued Nick, "I happen to know that there is an Eastern drug—not commonly used here in any form—which has this peculiar odor. Perhaps you noticed it yourself?"

"I did not!" cried Meyer. "I was too excited to think of such a thing."

"The fact that you were drugged is plain," said Nick. "As soon as you proved to me that you really had a visitor this evening, I saw that you had described your feelings exactly. You were most certainly drugged.

"But the means by which this was accomplished are entirely new in my experience. The person drugging you evidently risked exposure to do it. But, perhaps, had you not been sleepy, and had you risen to investigate the mistlike body you saw emerging from behind yonder curtain, you would have been met by something more formidable than a spirit, Mr. Meyer.

"Indeed, I consider your escape from death quite marvelous. The man who drugged you must have been prepared to either shoot you down or stab you, as the case might be.

"But he knew your habit of napping after dinner. And, too, he must have been well aware of your household arrangements. He knew that you would be alone in the apartment to-night. By the way, are you sure of your three servants?"

"I have had them all for years," declared the startled Meyer.

"It is not a servant's job, anyway," muttered Nick. "Of course, one of them might have traitorously given information as to your habits, but even that would be unnecessary. Undoubtedly the fact that you take a nap after dinner is known to most of the employees of the hotel. And that you were to be alone to-night was doubtless known, also, to many of the hotel people."

"But, sir, how was I drugged?" cried Meyer.

"Don't you see that? An extract of the drug I

mentioned, probably some preparation of it entirely unknown to chemists in this country, was sprayed into the air about you. Its odor dulled your senses. You beheld the 'smoke' of the spray squirted from behind the curtain, and it overcame your senses so quickly that you were put to sleep without any further difficulty on the part of the marauder."

"But I saw the same misty form escaping down the hall when I awoke!" cried the lawyer.

"I deny that," said Nick, shaking his head. "That is what you *thought* you saw. You admit you were dazed for some minutes. You doubtless saw the marauder escaping, but to your uncertain gaze his body did, indeed, seem misty. I reckon it was of the earth, earthy, Mr. Meyer, and had nothing at all spiritual about it."

"Your explanation is practical enough, Mr. Carter, I admit," said the lawyer, after a moment. "But, tell me, *who* was the visitor—and what did he want?"

"Why, sir, you must think me a wizard, indeed!" laughed Nick. "How can I reply to that? You are better able to answer it than I."

"I can't imagine——"

"Let me put you on the track," said Nick quietly. "What were you intending to do this evening, Mr. Meyer?"

"Why—er—read these papers," said the other, putting his hand upon the tumbled pile of documents on the table.

"You brought them home for that purpose to-day?"

"I did."

"And you find nothing here disturbed but these papers themselves?" demanded Nick significantly.

"That's right, Carter."

"Then it stands to reason that the marauder was after a sight of these papers, or expected to find among them something of value to himself."

"By Jove, you know!" gasped Meyer. "That sounds reasonable, as you say."

"So it would seem."

"But—how did anybody but myself and my clerk know what I was bringing home to-night?"

"We haven't got to that yet," declared Nick promptly. "Let us take one thing at a time. *How* your visitor got in, and *how* he knew you had what he wanted, are matters to be investigated later, it seems to me. We are now discussing the possible identity of the marauder, and what he was after. You doubtless know all the ramifications of the case to which those papers refer," proceeded Nick, watching the lawyer narrowly. "If there is any reason for the other side desiring to see the papers——"

"There is no other side," exclaimed Meyer quickly.

"Nobody who would desire to know all that *you* know?"

"Why—er—I declare, Carter! it would be unreasonable to suppose that a soul who *could* have got in here, and drugged me, and done all this, would have any reason for so doing! I tell you, I cannot understand who the person could be. There is just one man interested, perhaps, in what he *thinks* I have here," and Meyer waved his hand toward the papers, while he smiled peculiarly at Nick. "But I have the best authority for saying that it would be totally impossible for that man to have come here to-night."

"Why?"

"For one reason, he is—er—ill."

"Seriously?"

"So I am told upon good authority. But there is a better reason."

"And what is that?" asked Nick.

"He is under arrest."

"Ah! And your authority?"

"Is yourself, Mr. Carter!" cried Meyer, chuckling over his own joke. "These papers refer to the Spale estate. I can imagine nobody being interested in these papers but that Robert Spale, who is lying wounded seriously, and under observation by the police, at the present moment. And I doubt if even *he* would find these papers of much interest, for they are only odds and ends of things concerning the property, which were left in my hands by Mr. Herman Meyer when his own father died, years ago."

Nick Carter was more than a little surprised by the explanation of the lawyer, but his face betrayed little of his feeling. He merely listened to the man's words thoughtfully, and when Mr. Meyer ceased speaking, he asked:

"Has that lawyer of Spale, Finowitz, been to see you lately?"

"No."

"Are you sure of the rectitude of all your clerks, Mr. Meyer?"

"Eh? My confidential clerks have all been with the firm for years. We seldom take in a new clerk."

"And all are tried and trustworthy?"

"The youngest has been with us three years."

"Any fault to find with him?"

"Why—not much. At least, he seems honest enough."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Seems decent," said Meyer, evidently unwilling to give the young man a bad name. "You are on a wrong track, Carter. What could Bidwell know of these papers?"

"Where did you keep them in your office?"

"In the safe in my private room, to which only the chief clerk and myself have access," said the lawyer promptly, and evidently relieved that Nick's inquiries seemed to have been turned from the junior clerk.

"Then nobody but your confidential man and yourself could have had access to these papers all through this controversy over the Spale estate?"

"Quite correct."

"You took them out of the safe yourself?"

"No. Cramer did. Cramer is the chief clerk."

"When was that?"

"When did he get them for me?"

"Yes."

"Just before I started for home this afternoon."

"Did anybody else know you took the papers?"

"Everybody in the main office might have known," returned Meyer, with some impatience. "I had started out before I remembered them. I told Cramer what I wanted. He got them for me."

"Then your entire office force may have known that you were bringing home papers of the Spale estate?"

"Quite so."

Nick was silent and reflective for several moments. Then he said abruptly:

"I've got one of my young men downstairs. Can I use your phone to call him up?"

"Certainly," said Meyer, rising from his chair again. As he did so he half lifted the leather cushion in the chair, as though he would have reached under it for something. Then he dropped it back again, giving the apparently unconscious Nick another fleeting smile. The detective asked the clerk to send up "Mr. Garvan, who was waiting in the office," and then he asked the boy at the board to call his own telephone number. Joseph responded.

To his servant, Nick gave some instructions which occupied the time which elapsed before Patsy came to the door of Mr. Meyer's apartment. Then Nick met Patsy at the door and whispered for a few moments with him. Meanwhile Meyer went back to his chair and fidgeted uncomfortably until the detective was through with Patsy, and returned.

"This is all very mysterious, Mr. Carter," said the lawyer wearily. "What do you make out of it?"

"Not much—as yet," said Nick shortly. "By the way, you have no reason for suspecting any person connected with any of your other cases wishing a private sight of the papers in his particular matter?"

"As I told you long ago, I seldom touch any matter which has to do with criminal practice," was the reply. "I am mostly engaged in settling, or handling, family estates. I have no enemy. I do not understand why a soul—saving the wounded and arrested Bob Spale—should desire to see these or any other papers in my possession!"

"And those papers themselves are of little moment, I suppose?" queried Nick carelessly.

"Really, you are right! If the person who drugged me came here expecting to find anything of moment among these things," with a wave of his hand toward the heap of papers, "he surely was disapopinted."

"Just so," said Nick. Then he turned suddenly upon the lawyer, pointing an accusing finger at him, and speaking with quick sternness: "For the fact of the matter is, Mr. Meyer, the only valuable paper in the lot is tucked under the cushion of your chair, and you are sitting on it now—and were doing so, I presume, when the marauder was in here and examined these other papers."

The little man jumped in his chair, and despite the make-up on his face, a blush mantled to his very hair! He was both surprised and angry that the detective should have discovered his little subterfuge. But Nick did not give him opportunity to verbally express himself.

"I want to know if that paper has to do with the Spale estate, sir? How can you expect me to explain a mystery if you repress the most essential facts known to you? Do you call that a square deal, Mr. Meyer?"

"You are very sharp, Carter——"

"Now, this is no time for compliments," interrupted Nick, overlooking the lawyer's sneering tone. "Do you wish me to continue in this matter, or have you no further use for me?"

"Why—I have not willfully hidden anything of moment to your investigation," cried Meyer.

"Who's the best judge of that?" demanded Nick. "You are like a patient who sends for a physician to treat him, and then hides the symptoms and expects to be cured. I tell you right now, sir, that I will have the whole fact, or facts, or I refuse to have anything to do with the case."

"But I am sure you are on the wrong track, Carter. This thing that happened to-night had nothing to do with the Spale property, or with Bob Spale. Who else but that wounded man would have any interest in seeing——"

"That paper under your chair seat?" finished Nick. "I do not know. But what is the paper? That is the first thing to ascertain."

"Confound you, Carter! You have no right to make me reveal the secrets of my profession."

"Then don't expect me to reveal the secret of your mysterious visitor, for I can't!" cried Nick, in disgust.

"You mean——"

"That I throw over the case here and now, Mr. Meyer, unless you explain the importance of that paper to me."

Already Meyer was drawing it from beneath him. His wrinkled little face broke into a sly smile again. He held the thing up. It was a sealed packet, yellowed with time, and Nick bent forward to read the following superscription on it:

"TO MY SON, HERMAN SPALE, TO BE CALLED FOR AFTER THE PROBATION OF MY WILL.—JOHN SPALE."

CHAPTER V.

PATSY DISCOVERS A "DARK SECRET."

There has been mentioned previously the secret trust that the father of the murdered Herman Spale spoke of in his will, and which trust Bob Spale claimed referred to a legacy which the older Spale had promised him. The will said that a sealed packet of instructions had been left in his lawyer's hands for his son, to be called for after the probate of the will, and Nick Carter, on reading the superscription on this yellowed envelope, at once jumped to the conclusion that *this* was the packet in question.

But he could not repress his amazement. He started from the sealed packet to the peculiarly smiling face of

the lawyer, and his very look demanded an explanation.

"Yes, sir," admitted Meyer calmly; "that is what you suppose. It is the famous sealed envelope of instructions that John Spale left for his son."

"And you never gave it to him!" cried Nick.

"And I never gave it to him," admitted Meyer.

"Did—did you forget where you had put it? Was it lost, Mr. Meyer?" queried the puzzled detective.

"Not at all. I could have put my hand upon it at any time these last twenty years."

"I must say you puzzle me, Mr. Meyer," said Nick curiously.

"Well, you *would* have explained to you what is really none of your concern, Carter," said the lawyer tartly.

"And you are not explaining," returned Nick, smiling.

"You understand that that packet was left in my hands by Mr. John Spale, father of Herman Spale?"

"Quite so. To be given to his son."

"Well, not exactly," and it was now Meyer's turn to smile. "To be called for! You notice what it says on the packet, and you remember what was said in the old man's will?"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Nick, seeing a great light suddenly.

"Just so. I had no option in the matter. I was not instructed to give the packet to Mr. Herman Spale, and he never called for it!"

"A legal splitting of hairs, Mr. Meyer," said Nick, wagging his head.

"Not at all! I could no more than obey the behest of the testator. I was not told to give the packet to his son. I could not be expected to force it on the son. Indeed, had I tried to do so, I fancy Herman Spale would have refused to accept it. He evidently knew to what the contents of the packet referred. He merely ignored it. If it deals with a legacy to Bob Spale, *I* do not know it. And Herman never said a word to me on the subject."

"But when you drew the will of Mr. Herman Spale, did the matter not come up for discussion?" was Nick Carter's keen question.

"It did—for one minute," and Meyer nodded, screwing up his lips. "I asked Mr. Herman Spale what was to be done with certain papers in my possession, which had been left in my care by his father."

"And he said?"

"That he would attend to them in a codicil to his will."

"Ah! And he did?"

"He most certainly did *not!*" exclaimed Meyer. "And between you, and I, and the bedpost, Mr. Carter, I don't think he would ever have done so, even had he not been cut off so suddenly."

"Then what is to be done with that packet?" cried Nick curiously.

"As a lawyer I am not prepared to say. I am not sure of the legal status of the matter," declared Meyer. "As a man, Carter, I am frank enough to admit that I haven't the least idea what to do with the packet. If Herman Spale had died without a relative in the world that might try to break his will, I would open the packet out of curiosity, being the executor of the estate. But as long as Bob Spale is alive, I do not care to take that responsibility. If the packet contains private instruction to Herman Spale to care for his uncle, it is none of *my* business. It was a matter between Herman and his own conscience—if he had one. As for myself, I do not feel like putting money in the hands of a desperate assassin, or into the hands of his lawyer. Do you see my position, Carter?"

"I do," said Nick, rising. "And I fancy it is not a pleasant one for you. I have a vast curiosity about that secret trust myself. But the matter is aside from this present investigation. I want to look over your back premises, if you please."

"But you don't believe for a moment that whoever was in here to-night had designs on this packet?" asked Meyer, tapping the sealed and yellowed envelope.

"I see nothing else to believe. And, by the way, how comes it that it escaped the notice of the marauder?"

The little lawyer smiled slyly again, and there came out an expression of his natural cautiousness.

"Ah, Mr. Carter, although I have no reason for suspecting any of my servants to be dishonest, I don't know how curious they might be. If I am examining documents here, as I often do in the evening, and there is anything of special significance in them, those valuable papers I slip under my chair seat before I take my nap. You see, it has proved a very good habit, has it not?"

"Most excellent!" admitted Nick. "Now for the kitchen, sir."

They went back through the long hall of the apartment and into the kitchen where one electric light bulb was glowing. As Meyer had said, there was but a single window, but a very broad one, and the door leading into the public hall.

Nick examined the lock and saw no indication of it having been picked. The door was fastened, as the lawyer had declared; and unless the marauder had a key, it did not seem reasonable that he would have entered and left by this portal.

There remained, of course, the window, which looked upon a broad airshaft. Desperate as such an attempt would have been, from the first the detective had believed the man who had drugged Meyer, and examined his papers, must have come in, and made his escape by, the airshaft window.

It was not locked, and Nick opened it cautiously and looked out. In the depths was abysmal blackness. But here and there down the shaft on either side were the faintly glowing windows of other kitchens, which looked into the well. Not a shadow moved below. Above the well was roofed by an iron framework and thick sheets of glass, the ventilators around all four sides of which were open.

It was still raining, and there was mighty little to be seen above; but Nick drew from his pocket an electric hand lamp, the battery of which he could depend upon, and he shot a round shaft of light upward. He moved this "bull's-eye" about carefully until he found, almost directly above the window, a hook driven into the wall.

What its original use had been would be hard to tell. But it had been there a long time, for it was rusty. That is, the point and shank were red with rust, and so, too, was the under part of the loop of the hook.

But Nick's keen eye noted that the loop itself was rubbed bright and free of rust, as though a rope, or something of that nature, had been recently slung over the hook and worked back and forth. He gazed down the shaft, but saw nothing but the window ledges on which a man, climbing from the bottom by a rope, could have rested. And such a climb!

"The ourang might have done it!" gasped Nick, under his breath. "Could it be——"

"What's that you say?" asked the lawyer, as Nick pulled in his head. "You surely don't suppose that what I saw came in, or went out, that window?"

"Perhaps," admitted the detective.

"Why, you're crazy, man!" declared Meyer.

"And *that's* possible, too," chuckled Nick Carter. "But nobody has ever discovered it before, Mr. Meyer."

"I beg your pardon, Carter," said the little man, with some confusion. "But it does not seem reasonable that a real man could use that airshaft to reach my apartments—and I am, of course, not willing to admit that it was a ghost."

"I reckon he was real enough."

"Then, what do you mean? Do you realize that we are ten stories from the ground?—eleven from the foot of that airshaft, for it springs from the basement of the building?"

"Quite so," said Nick, nodding.

"Ah! you mean the roof?" cried Meyer. "He came from the roof?"

"No. He did not come from the roof. Those ventilators would not admit a small boy, let alone a man. And a stranger, coming down from the roof, would surely be discovered by some employee or guest of the hotel, in the halls, or in the elevator. This building is several stories taller than any adjoining structure. A man could not easily lower himself, or be lowered, from the roof of this building to an adjoining roof, even in this rain, without being seen. No. Your visitor came by the way of the airshaft, impossible as that may seem. I suppose the other four apartments on this floor whose kitchen and bathroom windows open upon the shaft are occupied?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the people?"

"Why—yes. I am more or less familiar with Bruce Gunning's folk and the Ennises. Mr. John Redway is a passing acquaintance; and Mrs. Boles would acknowledge my bow," said Meyer.

"It is a late hour, Mr. Meyer; but this is a serious matter. Will you try to get into touch with the neighbors and learn if any of them have been aroused, or disturbed, by a noise in the airshaft? This may become a matter for the hotel management to look into; I may be obliged to arrest employees of the hotel for either complicity in the thing or foreknowledge of it. And the sooner that evidence is adduced, the better."

"Right!" admitted Meyer, who admired the promptness of the detective. "I have no hesitation about speaking to Bruce Gunning. I don't believe he is in bed. And the Ennises are always up late. Come on."

He led the way into the corridor and rang the bell of the Gunning apartment. After a moment a man smoking a cigar, and in a beflowered dressing gown, appeared.

"Hello, Al," said Mr. Bruce Gunning, in amazement. "What's doing at this hour? Want to borrow money?"

"This is Mr. Carter—Mr. Nicholas Carter, the detective," explained the lawyer. "Something peculiar happened to me this evening. I am alone in my place, and I have been drugged by a—a burglar. We are trying to find out how he got in."

"Sh! For Heaven's sake, not so loud!" whispered Gunning. "You'll have the missus in hysterics again. I've had a circus with her already to-night."

"Is your wife sick?" asked Meyer.

"Is she easily frightened?" interposed Nick, taking up the inquiry.

"I should say she was! I guess we're having too much gayety and dissipation. She went into the bathroom about two hours ago, and hanged if she didn't give me the scare of my life. She swore there was a man hanging himself in the airshaft. By Jove! could that have been your burglar, Meyer?"

"That was the man, I reckon," said Nick, smiling at the lawyer. "Did you look yourself, Mr. Gunning?"

"No. I reckoned she was just woozy. I got her some medicine and made her go to bed. I didn't believe any man in his senses would choose the airshaft of this hotel to kick off in!"

"Well, it is not usually considered that a suicide is in his senses, Mr. Gunning," Nick said. "But I fancy that man is anything but dead. It is about as I thought, Meyer. The fellow came in and went out by your kitchen window. Whether he went clear to the foot of the shaft or in at the window of some other apartment in the hotel, we will soon discover."

"How?" demanded the skeptical lawyer.

"I fancy here comes the answer now," said Nick suddenly, as the elevator stopped at the tenth floor, and there sounded a subdued clamor of angry voices.

Mr. Gunning went back into his rooms, but Nick led the way toward the elevator, and Meyer followed. There suddenly shot out of the car the uniformed black bellboy whom Nick had noticed as he came into the hotel. Following him the lighter-colored elevator boy was likewise projected into the corridor against his will, and then appeared the person who had evidently been "the power behind the throne!"

"Ah, Patsy! you got them, did you?" said Nick easily, to young Garvan, and neatly stopping the rush of the blacker boy who evidently was on the point of making some desperate attempt to escape.

"Take the razor away from that coon, Nick!" advised Patsy. "I think he's foolish enough to think he's a bad man. This chap is buffaloed already."

And it was true that the elevator boy was blubbering, while his lips had turned drab.

"Williams! Pinky!" ejaculated Mr. Meyer, with a sternness that seemed to frighten the two hotel employees more than Patsy's rough-house work or Nick's grim clutch. "I am amazed at you boys. Come in here! Is an explanation due, Mr. Carter?"

"That's exactly what I sent Patsy for them for," said Nick, propelling the hallboy into Mr. Meyer's study. Patsy and the elevator boy brought up the rear of the procession.

"This is the detective, Mr. Nicholas Carter, boys," said the lawyer sternly. "It will go hard with you if you do not tell him the truth. I won't promise to save you from punishment, but if you tell the truth in every particular, I will see that you get nothing but bare justice."

The yellow boy sniveled; the black one scowled. Nick looked at his assistant, and said:

"Well, Patsy?"

"I put it to this here elevator chap, going down," said Patsy, grinning. "I told him the hall boy had blown the gaff because he hadn't got his share of the money that the elevator boy got from the man that he knew about. He didn't even try to deny it. Then I told him to keep still, and I'd try to pacify the moke there for a piece of the coin. It seems the yellow abomination got fifty plunks for what he done!"

"Ar-r!" growled the black boy, at that, flashing an angry glance at his brother in crime. "He done told me 'twas only twenty."

"Well," grinned Patsy, continuing, "you were an easy mark, that's all I've got to say. You knew the fellow was let into the basement by this elevator boy, and that he went up to the roof and slung the rope for the man—didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted the black boy.

"Would you have done it for a double sawbuck?" demanded Patsy.

"Naw! I wouldn't have been such a fool, boss."

"Well, this yellow guy wasn't such a fool as you thought him, either," chuckled Patsy. "That's all there is to it, Nick. The man hired the elevator boy to go up to the roof with a long, strong line wrapped around his body under his uniform. This line he unwound and dropped the two ends down the airshaft, hanging the loop of it over a hook that is there above Mr. Meyer's kitchen window."

"I saw it," said Nick.

"Well, that's all there was to it," said Patsy, "excepting that to-night the man came back, slipped into the elevator without being noticed by the man at the desk, and the elevator boy ran his car up for a couple of stories, and then dropped down to the basement and let the man into the bottom of the airshaft. The rope was hung after dark to-night, when the elevator boy went on duty."

"And when did the man arrange for all this?" queried Nick thoughtfully.

"He'd sounded the fellow before—had him on the string, it seems. But he did not get down to cases until this very afternoon. He came to the boy's lodgings and offered him the fifty and told him what he wanted done."

"Patsy," said Nick Carter, with an abrupt change of voice, and seemingly of subject, "didn't you tell me you were up to that house in Harlem to-day when that monkey of Bob Spale's was taken away?"

Patsy not only looked surprised, but startled, while Mr. Meyer burst into a loud laugh.

"That was no monkey that came in and drugged me, Carter!" cried the lawyer.

"And the monk's dead, chief!" declared the amazed Patsy.

"Indeed? You saw it, Patsy?" queried Nick, without turning a hair.

"I saw them carry it out in a bag."

"At what time?"

"Just before six o'clock."

"And what," said the detective, turning suddenly on the shaking elevator boy, as though this side issue had merely been sprung to take the fellow off his guard, "and what sort of a looking man came to see you at your lodgings this afternoon, and paid you for doing what you did?"

The mulatto jumped, being scared half out of his wits already.

"He—he was a sort of a fat man, boss," stammered the elevator boy. "I guess he was a Jew. I seen him many a time, an' he got lots o' money."

"And you let him down into the basement, to-night?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"And let him out again?"

"He went out t'roo de ash lift. I unlocked it for him before I showed him de bottom of de airshaft."

"It was the same man?"

"O' course it was, sir! I wouldn't ha' dared let anudder man down in de basement."

Nick waved his hand as though he were through with the two witnesses, and said to the lawyer.

"Want to have these boys arrested and held, Mr. Meyer?"

The keen-eyed little lawyer stared hard at the evidently scared negroes. Both began to stammer out pleas for mercy.

"I shouldn't show you any mercy at all, boys," declared the lawyer. "What do you think, Carter? Do you know their addresses?"

"They gave them to me," said Patsy. "I suppose you can verify them at the office, if you wish."

"And if they undertake to renig," added Nick stern-

ly, "we'll get them and put them straight through for what they've done. That right, Mr. Meyer?"

The lawyer nodded. "You hear what the detective says, boys," he observed. "You bear it in mind—and turn over the fifty to *me*. I'll see that no bad use is made of it, at least."

The two hotel employees were evidently relieved to find that they were not to be arrested, and they slunk out after humbly thanking the lawyer. He then turned upon Nick and his young assistant, and demanded:

"Well, Mr. Carter, what next?"

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CHICK REPORTED.

Nick Carter answered this question of his client by a glance at the clock on the mantel shelf, and by picking up his hat. The two things were so significant that Patsy grinned, and rose promptly to accompany his chief.

"Bed, Mr. Meyer—bed!" declared Nick. "We have done enough for this late hour. The man who drugged you has got away for the time being——"

"But, who is he? You certainly can't suspect a wounded and arrested man—a man under the eye of the police already? And, by Jove, sir! nobody would ever call Bob Spale fat."

"No. That is quite true. Nor is such an acrobatic feat as has evidently been performed here to-night one that a fat man could easily accomplish. But that point we will discuss later. To bed, Mr. Meyer, to bed!"

Nor would he say a thing further to the anxious lawyer, saving "good night"; but when he and Patsy were in the elevator he said hastily to the still sobbing elevator boy:

"Is there a cab out front?"

"I reckon so, sir. There is allus one or two about."

"Very well; we want that cab, Patsy."

So, the moment they reached the lower corridor, Patsy hurried ahead of his chief and beckoned the cabman who was lounging outside. It was an electric cab and the man saw that his fare was in a hurry and leaped nimbly to his seat.

"Uptown," said Nick, springing into the cab. "Lexington and One Hundred and Ninth. I hope Chick is there already. I telephoned Joseph to wake him up and put him on the job."

"Great Peter, chief! You don't mean to say you think Bob Spale is mixed up this this thing?" muttered Patsy. "Or is it the monkey you're after?"

"The monkey, perhaps," replied Nick grimly.

"Now, chief," said Patsy seriously. "I saw them take that critter out in the bag myself.

"Sure it was the big ape, eh?" queried Nick, smiling covertly.

"What was it, then? Would the bulls have let 'em through if it hadn't been?" demanded the young Irishman.

"Perhaps they took too much for granted, just as you did, Patsy."

Patsy shut up tight at that. He felt somewhat aggrieved, for Nick's words sugested that he had not been as careful as he might have been in keeping cases on the Harlem house and what went on there. He remembered that his chief seemed about to demand a fuller report of what had occurred up there that afternoon, but had been interrupted by the telephone summons which had taken them both to Mr. Alfred Meyer's hotel.

From what Patsy had gathered regarding the happening at the hotel it did not seem possible that a monkey could have so disturbed the lawyer's mind, and so startled him. The ape could have climbed up the air-shaft, with the aid of a rope, all right. But Patsy saw no reason for disbelieving the statement made at the house where Bob Spale lay ill that the ourang was dead.

He kept still for the remainder of the journey to Harlem, however; nor did Nick volunteer anything farther. A block from the house in question Nick halted the cab and they got out. They had scarcely paid the man when Chick joined them. He had evidently been lurking in a dark doorway, expecting Nick to appear.

"Well, I thought I was going to get a clean night's rest," said Nick's first assistant. "What's doing, Nick? Did you get your banshee, Patsy?"

"Let's hear what you have learned, Chick," interposed Nick, rather brusquely for him.

"To tell you the truth, Nick, I haven't learned anything more than Patsy already told us. The bulls are on the job, and Bob is to be removed from there to-morrow."

"Has the police surgeon examined him?" snapped the chief, walking steadily toward the house.

"No. He took Dr. Beebee's report, I believe, that he could be moved. They think that sawbones is hot stuff around here."

"Oh, that Beebee!" ejaculated Nick, shrugging his shoulders. "I might have expected trouble from him."

"Eh?" said Chick curiously, but Nick did not explain, and Chick pursued his report:

"I don't want you to think that I didn't go into the matter thoroughly, Nick, for I did. When Joseph told me that I was to make sure that Bob Spale was still up there, guarded by the cops, I knew you must have good reason for suspecting that he wasn't!"

"That shows moderate intelligence on your part, Chick," admitted Nick Carter, laughing.

"Well, I didn't take the bull's word for the fact that Bob was still here."

"No?"

"I made Whittling Johnny let me in. That fellow's a crab. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him by his ears!"

"Well?"

"He swore that Bob was asleep, and he tried to make me take his word for it."

"And you wouldn't?"

"Not me!" declared Chick, wagging his head. "I was from Missouri, I told him, and one of the original settlers of that far-famed State. He objected, but I made him unlock the bedroom door——"

"Had Bob locked up, eh?" interposed Nick thoughtfully.

"Why—ye-es. I don't know as that struck me odd. I reckoned Johnny was only trying to keep me from interfering with him."

"Well?" demanded Nick.

"So he opened the door, and I saw Bob in bed."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No. He was asleep. I didn't think it necessary to wake the poor fellow up. He's going to jail to-morrow, and that's another step toward the chair."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" commented Nick Carter reflectively.

"I guess there's little chance of his escaping the death penalty," returned Chick. "And I couldn't help feeling bad over it. That Whittling Johnny sprinkled some tears around, and made me feel rather mean. The guy's hurt too bad to try to make a getaway, I reckon."

"You think so, do you?" suddenly exclaimed Nick Carter, stopping short in the rain, and just before they reached the house in question, and eying his chief assistant with a good deal of scorn. "Let me tell you just what I believe has happened down to Alfred Meyer's place to-night, and then I'll ask you if you don't feel like changing your opinion regarding Whittling Johnny, at least.

"Alfred Meyer had a visitor. The mysterious visitor drugged the lawyer in a most astonishing manner, and in a way that must have been learned in the Far East, for, I swear, it was never done before in these United States!

"That visitor reached Mr. Meyer's apartment by way of an airshaft, up which nobody but an acrobat, or a monkey, could climb. And he got into that apartment for one purpose, and one only—to examine private papers referring to the Spale estate that Meyer had brought home with him from the office this very day.

"A rather fat individual—eh, Patsy?—bought up the good offices of a mulatto boy who runs an elevator in Meyer's house, and arranged for this visit of the unknown and mysterious acrobat. The boy let that fat man into the basement last evening and unbolted the ash lift for him, so that he could get out of the hotel that way.

"Would a fat man climb that airshaft, by a rope, and for eleven stories? Not on your life!" declared Nick, with emphasis. "What did he do, then? Why, it stands to reason that the man who did the trick was lurking outside and was let in by way of the sidewalk door after the elevator boy left the basement.

"Who do you suppose had the best reason in the world for imperiling his life to find out the secrets of the Spale estate? Bob Spale! And who would be able to climb that airshaft, and drug Meyer, and look at the papers? Bob Spale again!"

"And him with a hole through his lungs?" cried Patsy, breaking in.

"And lying up here in Harlem, a-bed, and several miles from the place in question?" added Chick, quite as amazedly.

"We don't know how serious that gunshot was," declared Nick. "We took Dr. Beebee's word for it, although it looked bad in the beginning, I admit. But ask yourselves this question: If Bob Spale did not visit Meyer this night, who did? What's the answer?"

"There is no answer," said Chick gloomily.

"Then he is the guilty party, and we've all been fooled by Beebee and Whittling Johnny. I ought to have shut that scoundrel up, in spite of his sister."

"And you believe I didn't see Bob in bed?" demanded Chick.

"And how could Bob have got out without the bulls seeing him?" added Patsy.

"Right under your nose, of course!" snapped Nick, and started on again with long strides.

His two assistants dropped behind and looked at each other with questioning gaze. They both thought the same thing. For once they believed their chief was "way off!"

CHAPTER VII.

WAS NICK'S SURMISE RIGHT?

Nick Carter was not in the habit of making mistakes, nor did he overlook them in his associates. And Chick, because he was so used to Nick's methods, and had been with him so long, seldom could be called to account for a lack of cautiousness.

But the great detective seemed convinced that either Chick—and Patsy, too—had taken too much for granted, or he was in strange error himself! His deductions relating to Bob Spale pointed to the fact that all hands had been fooled mightily by Bob and his helpers.

Those helpers, Nick told himself, were the scamp-lawyer, Emanuel Finowitz—Nick had identified him at once with the fat man who had bought the help of the hotel elevator runner—Whittling Johnny, the dock rat and Bob's especial friend, and the surgeon, Beebee.

Public as was Beebee's character, Nick Carter did not believe that the doctor was either a good or a trustworthy man. And he could see how Bob might have bought the surgeon's services—and he furthermore believed that he knew the price which had been paid Doctor Beebee!

Nick made no further remark until they arrived at the house. When he touched the basement bell a police officer opened the door immediately.

"Hullo!" he said. "I thought youse was the relief. It's time they come."

"All right," said Nick Carter. "You know me?"

"Sure, I know you, Mr. Carter—and your young men."

"We want to see the man who is nursing Spale."

"All right. Christy's at the kitchen door. He'll let you in."

The trio went down the half-lighted hall and found the second officer of the guard posted in a chair in front of the kitchen door of the flat, and nodding. Nick awoke him, and he sprang to attention before he realized that it wasn't his "boss."

"Oh! how-do!" he grunted. "This is wearying work. What's the matter now?"

"I want you to rouse out Whittling Johnny," said Nick.

"I reckon he ain't a-bed yet. I heard him in there not many minutes ago."

He thumped on the door. Almost at once it was unlocked, and the thin, dissipated face of the dock rat appeared.

"So he locks you out—you don't lock him in, eh?" commented Nick. "Well, Johnny, we've got to come in," he said to the fellow.

"Sh! don't wake up poor Bob!" whined Johnny.

"I guarantee Bob won't be awakened by anything I do or say," said Nick brusquely, pushing into the kitchen.

"He's jest fell asleep in his chair," explained Johnny, his bleared eyes squinting at Nick.

"Oh, he has, eh?" said Nick.

"This feller," said Johnny, in an aggrieved tone, pointing to Chick, "disturbed him when he was in here a little while ago, and he was bound to get up after that."

"And I'll have to disturb him some more," said Nick briskly. "Where is he?"

"In—in the other room," said Johnny nervously.

The detective strode toward the door of the next apartment, but suddenly turned to lay a heavy hand upon the shrinking shoulder of the wharf rat.

"Johnny!" he said threateningly, "you know I promised your sister I'd save you if you behaved yourself. Otherwise you go to jail. Understand what that means?"

"Ye-es, sir!" whispered Whittling Johnny shakingly. "I am going into that room. *Is it safe for me to do so?*"

"I—I—oh, Mr. Carter! I—I——"

Nick waited for no further word of explanation. He said sharply to his companions and to the policemen who had followed:

"Get ready for a scrap, boys. There will be something doing in half a minute," and then he turned the knob of the door.

"A scrap with a wounded guy?" grunted one of the officers. "What does he mean?"

Nick sprang lightly into the room, with a drawn revolver in his hand. He held the gun by the barrel, however, and evidently intended to use its butt only.

Beside the table, beneath the single dimly burning gas jet, sat the huddled figure of Bob Spale, dressed much as though he were going out on the street. He even wore a cap, and sat with his back to the entrance.

He really seemed to have been dozing, as Johnny had said, for he was stooping forward in his chair, and he sat up suddenly when he heard the sound of Nick's entrance. But the detective was beside the table and had reached across and touched his shoulder with a tentative hand before the figure in the chair turned.

Then he turned around with a screech, and bounded from his chair at the same instant. The blow that Nick Carter aimed at his head fell short, and the maddened beast, showing its fanglike teeth in a terrible grimace, and pawing the air with its long arms, sprang to the further side of the room and faced the startled party of interlopers.

"Howly mother of Moses!" shouted one of the cops. "'Tis the monkey come back!"

"Where's Bob Spale?" cried Patsy, while Chick himself was stricken speechless by his surprise.

"Watch that Johnny, one of you cops!" commanded Nick. "Don't make the matter worse than it is and let *him* escape. There's been enough bonehead work in this, as it stands; we don't want more."

"Bob must be in the inner bedroom," cried Patsy.

"I told you where Bob has been to-night!" snapped the chief. "You and the cops stood for those fellows carrying a bag out of this flat this afternoon. Bob was in that bag. You can see just about how dead this monk is!"

At the words the huge ape leaped for him. The ourang remembered its former quarrel with Nick Carter, and had it reached the detective now it would have clinched with him once again.

But Chick seized a chair and hurled it, with all his force, at the charging ourang. The brute was knocked over by the blow, and three of them sprang upon him before he could rise. They put manacles on its wrists and ankles and left him to writhe and chatter upon the floor.

"A nice mess, this is!" ejaculated Nick, rising and dusting his hands. "You ought to be proud of yourself, Patsy, for letting these fellows pull the wool over your eyes so easy. Of course, Spale has had his lawyer here to see him, and Finowitz and Johnny have planned this whole thing. As for the policemen who allowed that bag to be taken out of here without examining it, they will doubtless hear from the inspector, and find themselves up before Hanson for a grilling. Is that Johnny there?"

One of the disgruntled cops thrust forward the writhing wharf rat so that Nick could see him.

"That fellow to the jug!" commanded Nick. "I wash my hands of him. If the district attorney wants him—and his sister, too, for that matter—for complicity in Bob Spale's escape from the Tombs, I have nothing to say. Let him take his chance!"

He strode out of the basement, Chick and Patsy trailing behind him and feeling mighty foolish. It was not often that Nick displayed vexation, even when he felt it. And he had cause to be somewhat put out with his assistants.

He halted on the walk, however, and ignored the recent happening and shed his wrath like a mantle.

"There is something to do now, boys," he said briskly. "We have already fooled away too much time. But I had to assure myself that the suspicion I felt this evening when Patsy made his report was correct.

"Now, to work! Retrieve the mistakes that have been made, if you can. I am going to make a call—an early morning call—in the neighborhood. You, Chick, I put on the trail of Emanuel Finowitz. Get cases on him, if you can. There are two colored boys at Meyer's hotel, whom I want to see the lawyer, and identify him, if they can, as the man who bribed the elevator boy.

"You, Patsy, interview everybody about that hotel—all the nighthawks, and such, who might have seen anybody lurking about. Remember that the door of the ash lift must have been opened twice to-night; once when Finowitz let Bob Spale into the basement of the hotel, and again when both of them escaped.

"Bob was wounded badly. We don't know how bad, for it is likely that from the start Beebee fooled us. But what he did to-night must have been a great strain upon him, and he could not have traveled far after leaving the hotel without rest.

"He's hid up somewhere in the city, and we've got to find him. I won't trust to the regular force again in this case. He's too slippery for them. When we get him we'll nail him down somewhere until he is tried and goes up the river."

With which last disgruntled remark the detective turned on his heel and left his troubled assistants to their own devices.

"Come on," said Patsy, watching Nick walk away. "We're a couple of boobs, and we'd better get busy before the hayseed sprouts under our collars."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VIVISECTIONIST.

Here and there, interspersed with brownstone front residences and tall, modern apartment houses, on the upper East Side of Manhattan there are a few old residences that maintain their individuality and possess sufficient unbuilt-on land about them to set them apart from their neighbors.

Land is so valuable, however, that there are few of these old mansions left; but Doctor Beebee occupied one that had a considerable grassplot on either side, and an extensive yard in the rear.

There was a high iron fence in front, and a tall, cement-incrusted fence running around the other three sides, saving at the rear, where the back wall of a low cement-block building made the boundary of the small estate.

There were no windows in that rear building on the doctor's premises, and it was lighted only by a hatch in the roof. The hatch was set with heavy, clouded glass and nobody could see into the place by that means. Sometimes a dull light burned there all night, and some of the neighbors whispered that there were terrible secrets hidden behind the thick and soundproof walls of the doctor's laboratory.

Nick, of course, found the front of the Beebee residence shrouded in darkness; but he mounted the steps and punched the bell button vigorously. It was half-past two o'clock in the morning, and the street was as lonely at that hour as a country road. The rain, which glistened like an aureole around the street lamps and ran sullenly in the gutters, had driven all the night folk in this neighborhood to shelter.

Nick drummed his heels on the top step and punched the button alternately for five minutes. He had no compunctions regarding awakening the doctor's household, for he had learned that Beebee was a bachelor, and that there were but a man, an old woman, and a maid servant in the great house to attend on the surgeon's wants.

Although the doctor was so well known and admired at the hospitals for his knowledge, Nick had been curious enough to inquire regarding his social acquaintances, and found the result was much like the schoolboy's composition on "The Snakes of Ireland," which, in toto, read: "There ain't no snakes in Ireland!"

Dr. Beebee appeared to have no social acquaintances, nor did he ever appear out of his house on other than professional errands. He treated the poor and rich alike, if their complaints were "interesting." It was said that he made his rich patients pay for the free treatment he gave the poor. But he must likewise possess an income of his own to keep up his expensive establishment. The lease of the premises was a small fortune a year.

All these facts Nick Carter knew when he punched that bell button of Doctor Beebee's door, at half-past two of this rainy morning. And it was some minutes before there was any response to his summons.

Then, the heavy door was opened on its chain, and the pale, keen nose of an old man was thrust into the aperture. Nick sized him up for the manservant.

"Is the doctor at home?" queried the detective.

"He never answers a night call," grumbled the old man.

"That's all right. This isn't a call for him to go out."

"What do you wish, then?"

"I have come to see him on private business."

The servant looked Nick over doubtfully. "I—I never remember of seeing you before, sir," he questioned.

"I don't think you ever did. But, nevertheless, your master will want to see me. It is a matter that will not brook delay."

"I—I must ask you to wait till I speak to him——"

"But not out here in the rain," interrupted Nick, who had purposely come without his umbrella, and the drip of the rain had already saturated his shoulders.

"I suppose you might come in——"

"Indeed, I will," interposed the detective again, pushing at once into the hall, when the chain was

slipped. "Get me to the doctor as soon as you can, my man!"

"He—he is not in the house at the moment. I shall have to communicate with him."

"He's in his laboratory, out back," was Nick's conclusion. "I'll go right out with you."

The remark seemed to reassure the serving man. He believed that the visitor was a confidential acquaintance of Doctor Beebee's, and the latter had many such strange visitors. He nodded and allowed Nick to follow him through the house and down to the basement floor. By opening a grillwork door at the rear they were let out into the yard, and it was only a step to the door of the low building, where Doctor Beebee worked.

The man fumbled along the door frame until he found some hidden button, which, evidently, sprang an indicator somewhere within, where the doctor could see it. In a minute a square of the door, about six by six inches, dropped inward, and Nick beheld the eyes and sallow face of the surgeon.

"Well! What is wanted?" he demanded, seeing only the serving man at first. "Is the house afire? What are you here for, Maxwell?"

"A visitor, sir," said the old man, in a shaking voice.

Doctor Beebee consigned all visitors to the nethermost regions of scriptural punishment, and peered sidewise to glimpse Nick Carter. Finally he broke off, with a sort of grunt that was almost a laugh. He seemed to recognize the detective.

"This is, indeed, an honor!" he exclaimed. "Wait a moment and I'll let Mr. Nicholas Carter in. I don't suppose he has brought the police with him?"

"Not on this occasion," returned Nick grimly, while he waited for the heavy fastenings of the laboratory door to be withdrawn.

When the door was opened, the doctor shot out a single word to the manservant: "Go!" Then he motioned Nick to enter.

It was a narrow reception room, rudely furnished, but with glass cases all about, in which were arranged various specimens of anatomy. It was sedately illuminated by means of a single globe in the ceiling.

The larger part of the structure was reserved for the laboratory proper, into which a door led through a partition that Nick judged to be as thick as the outer wall itself. The building was constructed like a jail for strength.

The door in this partition stood slightly ajar, and the visitor saw that the room beyond was brilliantly lighted. His keen ear told him something else. There was something or somebody alive in the laboratory.

There was a continual rustling sound, and once Nick heard a faint groan, or moaning, which came from the inner room. Meanwhile, the doctor was closing and fastening the outer door.

He had in his hand a large white handkerchief, and he approached the detective, after attending to the door, wiping his fingers on this piece of linen. When he was through, he tossed it from him into a basket beside the table. Nick saw that there were crimson stains upon the cloth.

"And what can I do for you, sir?" demanded Doctor Beebee, with a sideways glance, that seemed to combine both slyness and some amusement in its expression.

"It is more likely to be what you will do for me, doctor," responded Nick quickly.

"Ah! Then you come to request, not to demand?" asked Beebee, seeing the point.

"You've hit it."

"And what is the point in question?"

"The ourang," said Nick quietly.

"Ah! What about that poor beast?" asked Beebee.

"I understand that Spale sold, or gave, the creature to you?"

"Dead or alive, Mr. Carter—dead or alive," declared Doctor Beebee briskly, and his eyes narrowed, as he watched the detective. "See here!"

He opened a drawer, and brought forth a paper, which he spread out in front of Nick Carter. It purported to be a bill of sale, making over to Beebee all Spale's right and title in a certain orang-outang to the doctor—perfectly legal in phraseology.

"The beast died, I understand?" said Nick, after glancing at the paper.

Beebee's narrowed eyes watched him sharply, and, without change of expression, he said:

"So I am informed."

"'Informed!' But you treated it?"

"Certainly. An interesting beast, indeed. I'd much rather have saved it alive."

"And it died in spite of all your efforts?"

"So I am informed," repeated Beebee.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nick. "Did you not assure yourself that it was dead?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. This is what he said:

"My dear Mr. Carter, I do not just see the reason for your inquiry; but I will be good-natured and answer you. The orang alive was a mighty interesting subject to me. I hoped to cure it, and bring it here to—to experiment upon, I suppose you would say. But an orang dead could only interest me from an anatomical standpoint. Merely its bones were valuable. When that fellow there told me that the ourang had died during the night——"

"What fellow?"

"The friend of the prisoner—Johnny."

"Ah!"

"He told me the creature had died. Had it been a human being, of course, I would have complied with the law. I would have made an examination, and then seen about the permit for burial. But we don't need permits to get rid of the corpse of a monkey, Mr. Carter," and Doctor Beebee actually chuckled.

"So, then, you merely sent your men for the beast?" asked Nick carelessly.

"No. I have not arranged for the beast's removal. I shall in the morning."

Nick watched him narrowly.

"You have no knowledge of the body of the ourang being removed from that house, then?" asked the detective.

The doctor seemed to really become interested now. A little color came into his face, and his eyes glittered, as he turned them full upon Nick Carter. At the same moment the low moaning from the laboratory grew louder. It seemed to annoy the medical man for the first time, and he arose with an imprecation, and closed the door tightly.

His visitor was glad of this. Whatever creature was making the sounds, it was undoubtedly in great agony, and the fact that the vivisectionist had come to him with the blood of the victim of his sacrifice on his hands aroused the detective's gorge!

"I don't just understand you, Carter," said the doctor tartly, sitting down again. "Who has got hold of the beast's body?"

"The police report that two men came in a cab and took the monkey away in a bag yesterday afternoon—about six o'clock."

"They showed no authority from me!" cried the doctor, with a very good imitation of anger, at least.

"They did not represent you?"

"No. And I'll hold the police responsible for the production of that body, Mr. Carter. It is an outrage."

"It is more than that," said Nick grimly. "It is a huge practical joke on the police force—and those men who were on guard will likely be broke for it. For I will confide to you a secret, doctor," pursued Nick, eying him warily. "The ourang was not taken away in that bag."

"What do you mean?" demanded Beebee. "First you tell me it was, and now you say it wasn't! And I really don't see why you should have come to me with the story, anyway."

"I think you will see the point in a moment, Doctor Beebee," said Nick calmly. "I have just come from that house, and have an ocular proof that the monkey is still there, and very much alive! It is, indeed, manacled for safety's sake; and there will probably be an inquiry made by the police department, for Bob Spale himself was carried out of the house instead of the monkey, this afternoon at six o'clock."

Beebee listened to this with great calmness. "I understand, now, why you came here, Mr. Carter," he said. "But if you think to fasten on me any fault for such an escape by Spale, I beg to say that I doubt if you will be successful."

"I certainly did not expect you to admit it, doctor!" laughed Nick.

"You are right. Were I guilty I should most strenuously deny it. As the matter stands, my interest only is in the fact that the orang-outang is not dead after all. That pleases me."

"And, of course, the gift of the man-monkey to you, doctor, in no wise affected your treatment of Spale, or your relationship to him?"

"If you will read the paper before you carefully, you will notice that I accepted the monkey in lieu of other payment for my treatment of Spale himself."

"Quite true. But suppose, when Spale is found, as he surely will be, it is discovered that his wound was not at all as serious as you gave us all to understand at first? Do you not expect an inquiry from that standpoint?"

"Unfortunately, no physician is infallible," said Beebee coolly. "I am never afraid to own a mistake when I have made one."

"But this looks like a costly mistake for the State, doctor," declared Nick. "I wish to tell you that Spale, since his escape by the means mentioned last evening, has committed a burglary and assault upon Mr. Alfred Meyer, a well-known attorney of the city. Those who have aided his escape in any way will be held—in a measure, at least—responsible for what he has done. Don't forget that?"

"You are threatening me, Mr. Carter, and that is something that does not disturb me in the least," declared Doctor Beebee. "My skirts are clear. I stated yesterday that the man was well enough to be moved, and told the police that I would not call on him again. Had the police removed him at once, the escape—which you inform me has taken place—would not have occurred.

"Is it my fault if the police, or the police surgeon, failed to do their duty? No! I cannot be held responsible for anything that happened in that house after I left it at eleven o'clock yesterday morning. I did, indeed, say I would send for the body of the ourang. But I have not done so yet.

"The only interest, it seems to me, that I can possibly have in the matter which you have come here in the middle of the night to bring to my attention is as it touches the fact that my orang-outang is alive instead of dead. I am rejoiced to hear it, Mr. Carter. I shall see that he is removed in the morning. I will go myself and get him, so that there may be no mistake. And I would like to see," concluded Doctor Beebee, fairly laughing aloud, "either you or the regular police try to connect me with this escape of Bob Spale, which is news to me, and which I hear now for the first time."

"So that is your last word, is it, Doctor Beebee?"

"I don't wish to be impolite," grinned the vivisectionist. "But really, I am very busy. My work awaits me. If you will excuse me, Mr. Carter——?"

He touched a button on the wall, and then went to the outer door and unfastened it. As he swung it open, the old servant man appeared.

"Just show the gentleman out, Maxwell," said Doctor Beebe, and, without bidding his visitor good night, he turned back to his laboratory, and opened the inner door. As Nick Carter passed out he heard the faint moaning of the victim on which the doctor had been at work, from the operating table of the inner room.

CHAPTER IX.

FITTING THE PIECES OF A PUZZLE.

As the old servant drew to the outer door of the laboratory, Nick saw him cringe like a dog that is beaten. He glanced around quickly enough to see that the doctor had not turned back, nor had he spoken to the man.

Nick's swift conclusion was that the old man had heard the moaning from the laboratory, and that he was not in sympathy with the experiments Doctor Beebee carried on there. But the detective merely watched the servant curiously, without betraying anything in his own face.

The man hobbled before him across the yard, and opened the basement door of the house without a word.

"The doctor's a wonderful man, Maxwell, isn't he?" queried Nick cheerfully.

"Yes, sir; they do say he is," mumbled the servant.

"And a busy man, too?"

"Always busy, sir."

"Of course, I am not the first person who has disturbed him to-night?" said Nick confidentially, and throwing out the bait hap-hazard, but hoping to learn something from the servant. "He seemed rather upset and short-tempered, as though he did not fancy being disturbed so often."

"I could have told you he would not be glad to see you, sir," said the serving man shortly.

"I wonder if you could tell me," said Nick slowly, "who it was that called on him before to-night?"

"No, sir; I could not tell you. And I would not if I could," declared the serving man tartly. "I am not in the habit of telling my master's affairs."

"I beg pardon, Maxwell," said the detective, smiling covertly. "I did not suppose you were. But I wondered if it was as important a matter as mine that had stirred up his ill nature."

"It was quite an unimportant matter, I fancy," said the man. "Only somebody asking the doctor to sign a commitment to a hospital. It was a charity patient, and the doctor has the power to obtain entrance of cases to most of the big hospitals. He is a man of mark, the doctor!" declared the old servitor, telling a whole lot more than he intended when he began.

"When was this call made?" asked Nick. "I tell you, Maxwell, my request seemed to come to him at a bad time. Had he been disturbed just before I came?"

"You ought not to come at such an hour, sir, unless you have business of great importance to the doctor," declared the man. "He has been at work all night; but he has not been disturbed since just before midnight."

"And that was by the man asking for commitment to the hospital?"

"The man's friend came in. The patient was very bad, I heard him tell the doctor, and he remained in the cab, I know. Then the doctor gave him the paper to get rid of him, because he was so insistent."

Nick knew better than try to find out anything further. The old man was so simple that he considered that he had told nothing definite about his master's business. And Nick had no idea that it was anything of importance to *him*.

He was satisfied in his own mind that Doctor Beebee was well informed regarding the plot that had taken Bob Spale out of the control of the police; but the doctor knew where he stood, and was sure of himself in case of any investigation.

"We'll make little out of him," thought Nick, as he left the house. "He's an utterly unscrupulous fellow, and as cruel as can be. It is too bad that poor ourang didn't die, for he's due to be experimented upon by Beebee, and that will likely mean slow death, and under most distressing circumstances. Hang the scoundrel, anyway! I don't know but I have wasted my time interviewing him."

Nick was some time in finding a conveyance to take him home, where he arrived not long before dawn. He found Patsy, eager and wide-awake, awaiting his coming. The young Irishman had just come home.

"Chief," he said, "we had great news right under our noses to-night and didn't know it. We could have found out a whole lot that we wanted to know from the very cab driver who took us uptown from the hotel."

"You can't mean it, Patsy? Well, then, I fancy you must have a good bunch of news?"

"I have, sir."

"Let's hear it."

"Whether it pans out anything of real importance will show later. But I can tell you how the fat man and the fellow that you suppose was Bob Spale left the hotel and got out of the neighborhood, after Bob had visited Mr. Meyer's apartments."

"That is the best kind of a leading clue, Patsy."

"Well, then, I'll tell you how I got my information. I hustled back to the hotel, and made a canvass of the district. I saw both cops—the one going off post and the one coming on. Neither could help me. That hotel is a quiet place, and they were never as much as called in there since it was built or they were in the precinct.

"Then I went for the nighthawks. They're scarce about that locality, you know, Nick. It is a taxicab neighborhood. Not a soul did I find who had seen anybody come out of the ash trap of the hotel, which is around on the side street. But I went there and examined the spot myself. The trap had been locked again—I suppose by the coon—and there didn't seem to be anything doing.

"I don't fall down twice in the same twenty-four hours, chief," continued Patsy, with a somewhat sheepish grin. "I hung around, trying to turn something up, and I *did*. At the end of the hotel building, between it and Johysen's furniture place, there's an alley. It was pelting rain, good and hard, and I stepped in there out of the draught and wet, to light a cigar.

"Crowding into the wall as I was, when I puffed on the weed, the match lit up a good deal of the slippery pavement and the side of the building. And I'm hanged, chief, if I didn't see, right at my feet and up against the side of the building, a big splotch of blood.

"It might have meant that somebody had a nosebleed, and that's all; but even *that* must have attracted some attention, and nobody I'd talked with had said a word about it. It was pretty fresh, too. The rain had washed most of the stain off the flagging, but it was fresh on the wall of the hotel, however.

"I had a bug, then. I asked every guy in the neighborhood if they'd seen a feller with a nosebleed, or otherwise spreading gore around. And, after a time, the very cab we went uptown in came back to the stand, and the driver heard me asking the carriage man in front of the hotel. He pricked up his ears right away, and seemed to know something. When he recognized me, he was ready to talk, too. I asked him about the blood, and he was wise to what I wanted at once."

"'I've been wondering about that,' says he, 'and expecting somebody would be around making a holler. What happened the guy? Was he stabbed?'

"'You tell me what you saw, and I'll tell you all I know,' I told him, so he opened up.

"It seems that about eleven o'clock—it must have been just before we got to the hotel in answer to Meyer's telephone call, and, of course, some minutes after eleven—this fellow was just returning from a trip with a fare to the West Side, when he saw a couple of men right there at the corner of the alley.

"One seemed to be drunk, or something. He was staggering, anyway, and the other guy was holding him up. The latter waved to the cabman to come over. But our man saw just as he turned into the sidewalk that the man who was being helped was bleeding. It wasn't from the nose—at least, he says his face didn't seem to be bloody——"

"What sort of a looking man?" interposed Nick.

"I asked him. He gave me a crude picture of what Bob Spale looks like, all right; and the other fellow was a fat little Jew."

"Finowitz."

"So I reckoned," said Patsy. "Well, the cabman didn't want his nice cushions mussed up, for the company would make him pay for them, and he didn't wish to be mixed up in any row, anyway. So he sheered off, and steered around the corner to the front of the hotel.

"But there was a hansom rattling across the avenue just then, and it passed him, going into the side street. He heard the man who had spoken to him holler at the driver of that cab, and he heard the horse stop. It was not an auto, you understand.

"Now, my cabman didn't look around the corner at all, and he isn't positive that those two men got into that cab; but in half a minute he did see the cab wheel around the corner, and start up the avenue lickety-split!"

"Does he know the hansom?" asked Nick quickly.

"Ah, chief! That's where I fall down again," said Patsy, wagging his head sadly.

"He doesn't know it, then?"

"Never saw the driver before, and paid little attention to him."

"Well, there aren't so many nighthawks driving old-fashioned hansoms in New York that we can't come around to the right one at last—if such a search appears to be necessary," said Nick, with cheerfulness. "Don't lose any more sleep over it, Patsy, for it is most morning, now. I will wait a while to see if Chick comes in, before going to bed myself. Of course, we have no means of telling where the strange cab drove Spale and Finowitz to——"

"Or if they really got into the cab at all," interrupted Patsy grumblingly.

"That's plain. The cab was driving through the side street in a certain direction. It had no fare in it, for your man faced it, and would have seen into the vehicle. There is no reason why it should have stopped, and then turned so abruptly, and driven in an entirely different direction, if it had not picked up a fare. If the driver had merely made a mistake in driving into the side street, he would have wheeled his carriage without stopping, you understand. But he stopped?"

"A half a minute," admitted Patsy.

"Then it is a fair presumption that two men, anxious for a cab, one of them wounded, would have boarded the first empty one that came along, if the driver would take them. The nighthawk would have no such reason for refusing the bleeding man that the taxicab driver had."

"We might look for a hansom that's blood-spotted," suggested Patsy, yawning, as he went to the door.

"We'll see about that to-morrow. Good night," said Nick.

Really, Nick Carter did not remain up alone to await Chick's coming. He lit a cigar, lay back in his chair, and pondered.

The ordinary man under the influence of Madam Nicotine allows his thoughts to ramble, and is led by fancy over every field of life and emotion—but to little effect. To the man who has trained his mind to concentrate on a subject, however, thinking tends to results.

Rapidly the detective's thoughts ran over the various happenings of the evening, and, with his customary acuteness, he began to dovetail his clues together—to piece out the puzzle of the thing.

He had already assured himself that Bob Spale, aided by Finowitz and Whittling Johnny—and not a little by Doctor Beebee likewise—had made his escape from under the very noses of the police—and from Patsy, too—at six o'clock the previous evening.

Finowitz had undoubtedly bribed some member of Mr. Alfred Meyer's office staff, and so learned when Meyer took home with him for perusal certain papers relating to the Spale estate, the contents of which the disreputable lawyer and Bob believed was of the ut-

most importance to their claim that a share of the great estate should belong to Bob Spale.

Nick had proven how Spale had mounted to Meyer's apartments, had utilized his knowledge of Eastern drugs and their uses to render the executor of the Spale estate insensible, and had examined all the papers he could find! The instructions regarding the secret trust had escaped the man's eye, and he must have descended to the basement of the hotel desperately disappointed.

And more than that. The man had been severely wounded; Nick had seen the blood upon his chest, where the bullet had entered. The doctor had possibly found the wound less dangerous than he first thought; but Bob had lost considerable blood before anything was done to stanch the flow.

Now, within a fortnight or thereabout, he had put himself under this tremendous strain of climinbing the hotel airshaft by the simple aid of a rope. It was an acrobatic feat that few men in the profession even would have cared to attempt.

But Bob Spale was a daredevil, and had been desperately anxious to get at the papers which he believed of so much value to himself.

Patsy's story, which he had gained from the taxicab driver—the story of the bleeding man—bore out the suspicion in Nick's mind that the work of the night had been altogether too much for Bob Spale.

The villain, without doubt, had been hurried away by Finowitz, the lawyer, to some hiding place prepared. Or—and this was a thought that flashed through Nick's mind for the first time now—was the case so serious that Spale had to be taken to a doctor's office—or to a hospital?

The idea stung Nick to sudden action. He sat upright in his chair, his acute brain weighing all the possibilities of this suggestion. And, likewise, he dovetailed to this thought the remembrance of the careless conversation that he had carried on with Beebee's old man servant, Maxwell, as they came from the vivisectionist's laboratory an hour before.

If Bob's wound had opened afresh, where more likely would Finowitz have driven him than to the office of the physician, who had been, at least, a passive member of the conspiracy?

Maxwell had said that his master had been disturbed before, or about, midnight by a person who wished to get Doctor Beebee's assistance in getting a man into a hospital. Into one of the more private hospitals, of course.

Perhaps Finowitz had hurried Spale to Beebee's, expecting that the doctor would treat him; but Nick, who had sized up the vivisectionist so well, was sure that, having washed his hands of the whole matter—and there being nothing further to be gained by treating Bob—Beebee would not personally attend him.

A letter had perhaps been wrung from the doctor by the lawyer, introducing the couple to the chief surgeon of some hospital. The idea was worth following up, and Nick proceeded to do that at once.

CHAPTER X.

THE FAGGED-OUT HORSE.

The indefatigable detective reached for the telephone directory, and thumbed the leaves until he found the list of hospitals in Manhattan and the Bronx. Naturally, he decided, if Bob Spale had been in such bad shape, as the indications seemed to point, the lawyer, Finowitz, would not have driven him any farther than possible.

Doctor Beebee should have given him an introduction to one of the near-by hospitals, and Nick Carter began his inquiry with that supposition in mind.

He used about the same formula in inquiring at each hospital. Having got the night superintendent on the wire, he asked if, since eleven o'clock, or thereabout, any patient had been entered suffering from a pistol wound, especially one that had partially healed and reopened. He briefly described Bob Spale, likewise, as the sufferer.

There had been two wounded men brought to one hospital within that time—the débris from a row in a Third Avenue saloon. But those were fresh wounds. No other hospital, as Nick went down the list, seemed to have had any such case brought in, either by the ambulances or privately.

The hope that he had caught on to a live clue gradually faded from Nick's mind, as the hospital list grew smaller. He even tried some private sanitariums that he knew of—strictly private establishments, where Beebee might have had influence enough to send Bob Spale. But all of these trials were resultless.

In the midst of these efforts Chick came in. He was ready to report on Finowitz, and he did so at once.

"That shyster lawyer has got his alibi all fixed up, you bet!" he exclaimed, dropping into a chair, and replying to Nick's first question. "According to the best information I could obtain, he started for Albany yesterday noon. It was a sudden call. I saw a cop who knows him, and who has a post at the Grand Central. He saw him take the twelve-fifteen train for the capital."

"To ride as far as One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, I presume," commented Nick.

"Probably. We're pretty sure that he was here tonight, anyway," said his assistant. "Yet he's just got back home, and, apparently, from Albany. He lives in West Forty-seventh Street, and I was hanging about the house when he arrived from the station. He came in a cab, and I followed the cab to the stable, and talked with the cabman."

"He picked him up at the Grand Central?"

"Sure. It was the cabman's time to go home, and his old horse was pretty well beat. He'd had a busy night, he said. He told me he'd just driven his last fare down to the station to catch an early morning train up into Connecticut, when this Finowitz came off the incoming Albany train, and took his cab.

"Cabby said he'd refused to drive him, only Forty-seventh Street was right on his way to the barn."

"Was it?" queried Nick sharply.

"Yes. I guess the fellow was giving me no josh. And the horse was completely fagged out. You never saw such a pitiful-looking old crowbait. It could hardly stand up when it reached the stable."

"It must have been driven a long way," Nick observed ruminatively.

"I reckon so."

"What kind was the cab—hansom?"

"Yes."

"Cabby own it himself?"

"Oh, yes. He was a regular nighthawk."

"Not too honest?"

"Why, I wouldn't want a friend of mine, if he was drunk, to be driven alone by the fellow. That's right," said Chick, with a laugh.

"And, of course, you wouldn't take your oath," said Nick, with a shrewd smile, "that all he told you wasn't gammon?"

"I don't see why he should have lied to me. I got acquainted with him quite naturally, and he pumped most of it into my ear without my asking a question."

"It came suspiciously easy, then?"

"Why—it didn't seem so, Nick. Seems to me you are mighty doubtful of my good sense to-night."

The chief chuckled. "After your fiasco up there in Harlem, what do you expect?" he asked. "And perhaps I have a reason for believing that the cabman might be paid to throw any questioner off the track. I believe that Finowitz and Bob Spale took a hansom cab of the description of this one you saw, after leaving Meyer's hotel."

In a few words, he described what Patsy had found out, and what he, himself, had learned at Doctor Beebee's house.

"If that cab horse was so petered out, it is dollars to doughnuts, Chick, that he had done something more than hustling about town with ordinary fares. It isn't a multiplicity of short trips that will wear out a horse in one night; it is a long, hard drive.

"If, as we suppose, Bob's wound broke out afresh, and he was driven to Beebee's, and from there to some retreat where his wound could be properly attended, it would likely be a long journey for the cab. It might have been over into Jersey, even—Ah! you have thought of something, Chick?" asked Nick, seeing his assistant's face suddenly flush.

"I don't know but I have, Nick. Seems to me I should think of all these things myself. That horse had been out of town, I'll be bound."

"Proof?"

"It's a nasty night; it's raining yet, Nick. The horse was incrusted with mud—legs, belly, and all—and the cab was a sight!"

"Ah! What color was that mud, Chick? Of course, almost any carriage on the streets to-night would be mud-bespattered. Don't overlook that."

"But this was country mud, I'm sure," declared the eager Chick. "It was red."

"Jersey," said Nick shortly. "Had it been yellow I would have tried Westchester. No wonder I did not strike the fellow at any of the local hospitals. Ah! that Beebee is a shrewd one."

"And what help is that guess to us?" grunted Chick.

"Let's be sure we're right in the supposition, first. Did the cabman clean his horse and hansom before he left the stable?"

"I saw him rub down the beast, and left him at work on the hansom."

"Naturally. It would be harder to get off when it dried. That Jersey red clay sticks like a burr. Now, Chick, I have called up all the hospitals in Harlem, as well as some others. It looks reasonable that the hansom went into Jersey.

"Finowitz would not be likely to take two cabmen into his confidence. His being driven home from the Grand Central Station was only a blind, of course. He took Spale, by Doctor Beebee's advice, clear out into Jersey, somewhere. I'm willing to wager good money on the red mud!

"You go to bed, Chick. I'll take a few winks myself, and then we will all be fresher to pick up the threads of the difficulty again. Your work will be to continue shadowing Finowitz. I'll take Patsy with me when I start out after breakfast. I am convinced, Chick, that your fagged-out horse is a mighty good clue. But your cabman friend is, undoubtedly, a most unscrupulous liar!" and Nick chuckled, as he sought his own room for some much-needed rest.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BROTHERHOOD.

With Thomas A. Edison, Nick Carter believed that much sleep was neither needed or good for the man of active brain. Sleep renews the exhausted body; relaxation, both mental and physical, rejuvenates the exhausted brain.

Joseph awoke him two hours after he lay down that morning. He had slept soundly—as peacefully as a child. Now, he went to his bath, which was, because of his night's work, rather more elaborate than usual. Joseph was an accomplished masseur, and when Nick finally came from his dressing room and entered the family breakfast room of the house, he was in a perfect glow, the blood coursed through his veins vigorously, and there was not a tired muscle in his whole body.

He had warned Patsy to be on deck early; but Chick did not appear, being confident that his game, Finowitz, would be housed for most of the forenoon, he having returned to his rooms so late in the morning.

Nick discussed the case with young Garvan at breakfast, and when they left the house at ten o'clock, it was to take the motor car, with Danny to drive, directly to the West One Hundred and Thirtieth Street ferry.

"The trail of red Jersey mud," said Nick laughing, "leads us thusward! No doubt of it. They don't have

such mud on Long Island, and north of New York the mud is yellow. Jersey red paint for carriage wheels is famous. And the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street ferry would be the likeliest route, I believe, from Doctor Beebe's house."

The boats ran very infrequently from this street to the Jersey shore after eleven o'clock at night. The wounded Bob Spale could not have been brought there earlier than midnight, and perhaps it was as late as one o'clock.

Nick learned on inquiry that there was a one-o'clock boat out of the New York slip, and the crew that had manned the boat at that hour were still on duty. Nick had the car driven right aboard the boat, and during the trip across, he interviewed every man, from the pilot to the fireman.

Several remembered that there was a hansom cab went over on that early boat, and that it had returned two trips later. There were two men in the cab, and the driver up behind, when the cab went over. How many were with it when it returned, none of the crew could tell. Some seemed to think only the driver.

Where the cab had gone after reaching the Jersey shore was something that nobody could tell. Nick's knowledge of the Jersey suburbs was extensive, and he had brought with him a map with not only the principal roads marked on it, but the by-paths and the principal residences.

Every public institution, in the nature of a hospital, at least, was defined on this map. Having made sure that the hansom had crossed by this route, Nick looked up a telephone booth, as soon as Danny ran the car off the ferry boat, and he made inquiries over the wire of such hospitals, as he had in New York.

No reported case fitted the description of Bob Spale, or dovetailed with the time in which he had been brought across the river.

"It is a private institution, or else some quiet house, where he can obtain medical treatment without suspicion being aroused," Nick observed, coming back to the car, and taking another turn at the map, which, in the meantime, Patsy had been studying.

"What's that joint?" asked Garvan, pointing to a dot showing on one of the roads running westerly from the ferry house. "I don't find it indexed on the margin here, chief. It is some public building, I suppose—a schoolhouse?"

"Schoolhouses are marked in red," replied the detective. "Let—me—see? Why! that's a religious society that own that place. It was the family mansion of the Vansittarts, ages ago. The family fell into decay, and within a few years a community of monkish fanatics have taken over the place. Rather in the line of a communistic settlement, I fancy. Charitable, and all that.

"Patsy! you've set me thinking. I believe I know something about this Brotherhood. I have heard that they follow the teachings of the story of the Good Samaritan very closely. They do good where they find it to do, and help anybody who comes in their way, without question as to his religion, birth, or previous condition of servitude."

"A mighty good rule, that," grunted Patsy. "Some of these charitable organizations keep a poor man sitting on a piece of ice for a week, while they look into his antecedents."

"Danny," said Nick briskly, "take that road."

The car turned into the highway on which the retreat of the Brotherhood was situated. It was two miles and more from the ferry. When they came in sight of the tall chimneys of the mansion, which sat on a knoll and was surrounded by a high-fenced park of small size, Nick ordered the car brought to a stand.

"This is a wild-goose chance, boys," said the detective, hopping out. "But it hasn't stopped raining three hours yet. The roads, as you see, are still mostly red mush; but the ruts are stiffening."

"This doesn't look to me to be a very much-traveled road. At least, we have passed few vehicles, and the wheel marks since the rain stopped are few.

"You remain with the machine, Danny. Patsy, there is some kind of a wagon track all around this inclosure, I believe. You go one way, and I will take the other. See what you can find in the line of wheel tracks—especially near the entrances to the grounds."

There were few houses near the estate owned and occupied by the religious community known as the "Brotherhood." The detective and his assistant each made his half circuit of the grounds without seeing a person to speak with.

"Nothing on the main road," reported Nick. "I don't believe that hansom came this way, after all."

"There was some kind of carriage turned into the lower road, and wheeled around at the back gate of the place," said Patsy. "I wish you would come and look over the trail, chief."

The instant Nick Carter saw the wheel marks he pronounced them to have been made by a two-wheeled vehicle.

"Notice the turn, Patsy? Had it been a four-wheeled carriage the rear pair would not have tracked with the front wheels going around the corner. I guess you have hit it. The hansom was driven to the back of the premises."

At the high gate, in the hedge, it was plain that the vehicle had been turned, going towards the river again by way of a back road. There were several half-dried footprints in the mud by the gate of the place.

"It is worth looking into, that's sure, Patsy," said Nick. "It might be just as well for you to linger about here and keep this exit in view. We do not know but Bob Spale might be smuggled out while I make inquiries at the front."

"If he's here," murmured Patsy.

"Of course. That little 'if' must always be taken into consideration, my boy," returned Nick cheerfully.

The detective proceeded to the main entrance of the park, and rang a single note on a large gong that hung above the gate. The summons brought a slow-pacing man, in a brown cloak and cowl, to the gate. The uni-

form of the inmate of the community house so shrouded the face that it was quite impossible for Nick to tell what manner of man he was talking with.

"What is the nature of your visit, sir?" asked the Brother courteously, evidently examining Nick curiously, through the narrow bars of the gate.

The detective could see up the broad, neatly kept graveled path to the porch and open door of the old mansion. Everything about the place looked particularly sombre; the inmates, perhaps, considered it only peaceful. There was not another soul in sight but he who had answered the bell.

"Are strangers admitted here?" queried Nick slowly.

"Do you mean visitors?" demanded the Brother. "We must often satisfy the curiosity of strangers. We are open to investigation by all legal authority. And we really court inquiry by the general public. Otherwise, we might engender suspicion of our good intentions in the minds of the ignorant."

"Must I admit that my curiosity spurs me to crave the privilege of looking over your institution?" said Nick carefully.

"You would not be the first who has entered from that cause," and the Brother began to undo the fastenings of the gate. "You do not seek retreat yourself?"

"I do not."

"You impress me, sir," pursued the Brother, who was a soft-spoken man, and seemed to be an aged one, as well, "as one of those vigorous, active spirits that believe they will never be attracted by such a monastic life as ours. Ah, my son! you and your kind know not the meaning of peace."

"You are quite right there, I believe," admitted Nick Carter, as he entered, through the gateway, and then lingered, while the Brother refastened the former. "You do not demand any introduction, then, when you allow strangers to pass your portal?"

"No. Our belief would forbid it. We take all on trust. If they prove, after a time, to have entered from an entirely selfish motive, we send them away with our blessing—after they are healed."

"You are not only a charitable, but a medical fraternity, then?"

"Many of the brethren have passed through the schools of surgery and medicine. We relieve both the physical and soul needs of those who come to us. We have a most excellent hospital, and might be overrun with patients were it not for our rules."

"Yes?" queried Nick, keeping a sharp lookout, as they walked into the house.

Several cloaked and cowled brethren passed them. They neither stopped, nor spoke to his guide, or seemed to have any curiosity regarding himself.

"Our law does not actually forbid speech," said the guide quietly. "But our rules, and even our uniform, discourage it. We hold that for a soul to become contemplative there should be little to attract his eyes, or his mind, from good. See yonder—through that window. There are some of the brethren at work in our garden. Their faces are not revealed to each other, and while at work, other than necessary, speech is not encouraged.

"If we do not behold our brothers' faces, then we may not be attracted to one more than to another. For the attractions of the physical man, as the old saying has it, are but skin deep. This rule of going cloaked and cowled applies to all who enter here, begging our assistance. It is a small matter; yet it would keep many a man outside our gates. Those who come, we help if we can."

"No matter who he is?"

"That we do not ask. Let him be criminal or saint. When our gates open to him, and he complies with our simple law, it is as though he entered a veritable City of Refuge. We seek to know nothing regarding his past. It is his future, both here and hereafter, that interests us."

"And even those who are brought here ill are so clothed?" asked Nick.

"If such cowling does not interfere with the healing of the patient's disease. Will you go through the dormitories, see the cells of the brethren, and visit the hospital wards?"

Nick knew that, by appealing to the State authorities, he could force these fanatics to break their rule, and to show him the face of every man in the settlement—well or ill. But while he was bringing this about, if Bob Spale were now here, the assassin might get wind of these legal proceedings, and escape.

The detective saw that the Brotherhood was a harmless, if a fanatical, community, and he did not wish to cause them any trouble. He was detrmined to go through the building, however, and, if possible, make sure whether Bob Spale was there or not.

He had drawn from the Brother's remarks that any personal inquiry regarding the inmates of the place would be met with the statement that nothing was known of any of those persons who came to the Brotherhood for assistance and shelter.

"I would be glad to go over your institution, sir," the detective said, coming to a rapid conclusion. "But I have a request to make—perhaps it is an idle fancy, you will say. I do not wish to appear conspicuous. Let me wear one of the cowls and gowns while I remain here?"

"Certainly," said the Brother quickly. "It would really be doing the brethren a favor, if you did so. It takes so little to attract our carnal minds from the greater things of existence. Here, sir, is both a gown and hood. We keep plenty for visitors, if they are kind enough to don them."

In a moment the detective was completely disguised under the brown cowl and cloak. They went slowly through the great house, and at another time Nick would have been greatly interested in this strange life which the community led.

His keen attention, however, was eternally given to the apprehension of some word, or voice, or figure, that

should reveal Bob Spale to him. He did not expect to find Spale moving about in the company of the brethren themselves. There were several evidently convalescent patients on the rear veranda, who aroused Nick's curiosity to the highest pitch; and when he was taken through the several wards of the hospital, in the upper stories of the building, he longed to snatch the hideous cowls and gowns from the figures lying on the beds.

He had to admit, when he descended to the reception hall again and removed his own disguise, that he was baffled. To institute legal proceedings to find out if Bob Spale was or was not in the institution not only went against the detective's desire, but he believed it would be resultless.

If Finowitz, Spale's lawyer, had brought Bob here, he would be watching for the next move of the New York authorities—especially for the activities of Nick Carter himself.

To ask a magistrate anywhere in Jersey to issue a search warrant for such a charitable institution as this would be to create a public controversy, and Nick was averse to that.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "A man should have a positive power of mind-reading and telepathy to discover one person from another under these shrouds. And I do not possess such powers. This is a matter for a clairvoyant, or for somebody like—Ah! the professor! That's an idea worth looking into."

He thanked the courteous Brother, asked if he might come again and bring a friend, and then was let out of the great front gate. And he believed he had an idea worth cultivating.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FALSE TONE.

"This is taking a good deal for granted," Nick admitted, in talking over the situation with Patsy Garvan and Danny, the chauffeur. "But the mud Chick saw this morning on the wheels of the hansom that brought Finowitz home proved to my mind that the hansom had been over here in Jersey. We traced such a hansom across the river, and we have conclusive evidence that it came to the rear gate of this Brotherhood place. Those tracks in the mud cannot lie.

"I feel sure that Bob Spale is somewhere among those cowled and robed men in that institution. How long he purposes to stay, we do not know. If he is strong enough, he might go to-day. But he may believe himself mighty well hidden in this strange community. And under ordinary circumstances that would be so. Our tracing him is a matter of chance more than anything else.

"Now, boys, I am going to leave you to watch the place—and to watch all those who go out, or who visit the Brotherhood. The members do not go out cowled, and, of course, no visitors are allowed to take away the disguise with them. If Bob Spale leaves, you must know it. One of you can remain in the machine, hidden back here in the side road; the other must watch the premises. You can shift positions, as need may be. And I'm off for town. If Finowitz should come here, Chick will, in all probability, be shadowing him. Keep an eye out for Chick, and work with him."

"And where will you be, chief?" queried Patsy.

"If I find the man I want, you'll see me back here before the day is done," said Nick, quickly turning away and striding down the road toward the nearest electric car line.

The car took him to the ferry, and from there he telephoned Joseph at the house, and had one of the other cars sent uptown to meet him on the Manhattan side of the river.

The new idea that was stirring in Nick's mind carried him across the city and over the ferry into Long Island. There his objective point lay in a roadhouse, near the spot where he had had his first terrible struggle with Bob Spale's man-monkey, down beyond Corona.

This roadhouse was like a hundred other inns of the kind scattered over the length of the island—a place where automobile parties were wont to halt, and eat, and often imbibe more drink than was good for them.

But there was an inmate of the house Nick Carter wished to interview. This person had greatly interested the detective, when he had first visited the place—and, indeed, Professor Mahoney, as he called himself, was a character to interest any thoughtful person.

It was still early in the afternoon when Nick concluded this run from Jersey to the Long Island roadhouse. There were few people around the place, and those were in the barroom. Nick slipped into the café, where he heard the soft notes of the piano, where the professor sat, dreaming and striving to pick out the music that he had once known so well but had now all but forgotten.

He was a quaint figure, as he sat there, in the dimly lighted room, with his mane of whitened hair, and his long, dexterous fingers running softly over the keys. His deep brown eyes had in them the vacant stare of the somnambulist, and Nick might have remained quietly in the café for an hour without being recognized.

Nick crossed the room, and placed a hand upon the musician's shoulder. The professor started, and looked up at him, blinking like a person just awakened from sleep. After a moment, and when the fingers were stilled upon the piano keys, he recognized his visitor.

"Indeed, I am glad to see you, sir. You are welcome," said the strange musician, who, although about thirty-eight years of age, looked to be seventy.

"So you remember me, eh?" queried Nick, smiling down upon him.

"Ah! I could not fail to. I told you that I was strengthening my memory of recent happenings. Only my old life—that life that I—I lost, somehow—will not return to me," and he shook his head sadly.

"You were philosophical about that when I talked with you before," said Nick. "You know, you said it

was perhaps for the best that you could not recall painful passages in your life."

"Oh, but the music, sir!" murmured the other sorrowfully. "I hunger for the music so. I fancy that, if I could remember the trouble I suffered, and which made me what I am, I might also remember the beautiful music I composed then, too. It would pay, perhaps—the music for the bitter memories?"

"And perhaps not," returned Nick firmly. "We don't know that, you see. But I am glad you remember *me*, at least."

"And I remember what we talked of," whispered the professor, his face paling a little, and shuddering visibly, as he looked up at Nick. "That terrible man!"

"It is about him I have come to talk to you," said Nick.

"Oh, no, sir! Don't say that!"

"I am sorry to tell you, it is true. That wicked man is still at large, and he is a criminal of the deepest dye."

"I knew it!" whispered Professor Mahoney. "There was a false note in that terrible man. A false note? Why! everything about him is out of harmony—is off the true key! I feel it, I know it. When I am near him—Ah! why should I worry myself about him? He is gone from this neighborhood."

"But he has done much harm elsewhere," said Nick quickly. "And my work is to overtake him, and have him punished for his crimes."

"You have my prayers for your success, sir," said the professor simply.

"But I need your help in more material ways," declared Nick.

Professor Mahoney looked at him in surprise, and the detective continued to outline briefly, and in language that the man could not fail to understand, something of Bob Spale's desperate story, and of his present situation in the retreat of the Brotherhood in Jersey.

"The scoundrel must be overtaken and put behind the bars," said the detective earnestly. "And I believe it is the duty of every good man to assist in a bad man's arrest."

"But—but—what have I to do with this terrible creature, sir?" cried Professor Mahoney helplessly.

Nick Carter sat down beside him, and explained carefully, patiently, the work that he wished the musician to do. It was not that the man did not understand him; but he shrank, as he said, from ever coming in contact with such a person as Bob Spale.

The professor's nervous and delicately adjusted temperament made him most susceptible to all impressions. Bob Spale had made a strange impression on the musician's mind; as Mahoney said, the assassin was completely out of harmony with all the universe.

It was the professor's claim that everything in the world—every bird, or beast, or flower, or man—every living thing—should be in harmony; and he was one of those strangely adjusted instruments that immediately discovered the false tones, if there were such, in all whom he met.

On the occasion when the musician had met Bob Spale, when that individual was living in this vicinity, the effect of the brutal fellow's personality on the high-strung musician was very unhappy. Professor Mahoney was really afraid of Spale.

Nick Carter, however, had made a deep impression on the unfortunate musician, whose mind had been quite shaken by some family trouble. He liked the detective, and the latter moved him as no one else could. After some effort Nick induced him to say he would do what was desired, and while the decision was fresh in his mind, he carried him off in his car, despite the objections of the manager of the roadhouse, who would have to get along without the professor's music for one evening.

They raced back across the island, crossing the East River by ferry, Manhattan itself, the Hudson by the other ferry, and so reached the Jersey shore before six o'clock. Nick gave the professor no time to think over what was coming, and so lose what little courage he had.

The detective stopped at the office of the chief of police of the town in which the establishment of the Brotherhood was situated, and with this official went before a magistrate and swore out a warrant for Bob Spale's arrest.

Then the party went on to the religious retreat, where the detective believed Spale was in hiding. They found Patsy and Danny still watching the premises. Patsy reported to Nick that nobody had left the settlement by either exit; but he showed his chief a New York paper that had a full account in it of the mysterious escape of Bob Spale from the janitor's flat of the Harlem apartment house, where the police had been watching him.

"There'll be great doings over that," commented Patsy. "And while the force are running around like hens with their heads off, will we be likely to turn the trick here, chief?"

"I believe we shall," declared Nick Carter.

With Professor Mahoney, the detective approached the main entrance of the retreat, and was met—after ringing the bell—by the very Brother who had shown him through the place that forenoon. Nick could not see the face of the inmate, but he recognized his voice, and, besides, he felt that there was a note of satisfaction in it when the Brother welcomed him.

"And this is the friend of whom you spoke?" queried the Brother, plainly examining Professor Mahoney closely.

"One whom I feel sure will be interested in your retreat, and in the work you do here," Nick said, truthfully enough.

"It is evensong. Will you join us in the chapel, before you go over the house?" said the Brother, evidently recognizing in Mahoney a personality on whom the quietude and peace of the place was bound to have an inspiring effect.

"This is a good place to which you have brought me, sir," whispered the unfortunate musician, in Nick's

ear. "All harmony here—no strife, no wickedness; everything at peace. Surely, you cannot believe that terrible man would seek such a place?" and he shuddered at the thought.

"Let us go over the house. We shall see," returned Nick, following the Brother indoors.

Through a long corridor they saw a column of the brown-robed and cowled figures walking, two by two, to the chapel. In the distance the organ sounded, and Mahoney's eye brightened.

The Brother gave them two gowns, helped them into them, and pulled forward their hoods; then, he beckoned them to accompany him in the direction of the music. Soon they reached the chapel, where, as they entered, the men's voices rose in song.

It was an impressive musical service, and Mahoney was at once in touch with the spirit of it. When they came out, after fifteen minutes, Nick could feel his hand trembling on his own arm.

"He was not there," whispered the poor professor. "All was harmony—not a discordant note. I thank you for bringing me, sir; but that terrible creature could never exist in this peaceful retreat."

"Let us see," returned Nick softly, as the guide began to lead them over the house, with which Nick was now more or less familiar.

The second floor of the building was divided into innumerable little rooms, or cells, each devoted to a single Brother, or a guest, as those who were charitably taken in by the society were called. There was no way of telling a guest from one of the qualified inmates of the establishment.

But Nick did not believe that Bob, brought here to recover from a bad gunshot wound, would be on this floor. He expected to find him above, in one of the wards of the hospital, and he went through the routine on this lower floor very impatiently.

Professor Mahoney was deeply interested, however, and he asked many questions, in a low voice, of the Brother who accompanied them. He seemed to have forgotten all about his reason for being brought here until, on mounting the next flight of stairs, they came to the door of the first ward.

"Ah!" he murmured, shrinking back to Nick's side. "There is suffering here. These poor people are sick?"

"Yes," said Nick, watching him closely.

They went into the ward, and Nick led him up and down the aisles between the beds. Mahoney was sad and subdued; but he gave no sign of trouble. Then, they went to the next ward.

"These are the more serious cases," whispered the Brother. "Will you go in?"

"We'll step into the place," said Nick slowly.

And then, of a sudden, he realized that Mahoney was tugging at his sleeve.

"What is it?" he asked his companion.

"I—I do not want to go in there. Let us turn away," exclaimed the musician hurriedly.

"Why not?" demanded Nick. "What do you feel?"

"All wrong—all wrong!" muttered Mahoney. "This is not in harmony. There is something *bad* here. I feel ——"

"Well, what *is* it?" asked the anxious Nick.

"There is something, or somebody, here that is all out of harmony. It may be that—that the horrible creature we are looking for is here."

"Come in with me!" commanded Nick. "Keep close by my side. You need not speak at all, but if we pass the bed of that man, show me. You can feel it when you are near him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then do this. Remember that you are doing the right thing to help me. Come on."

He almost had to drag poor Mahoney into the ward. The Brother had not noticed their conversation, but was ahead. Nick and the trembling musician followed, arm in arm.

Suddenly Mahoney started back, and cried out, though under his breath. His eyes were fixed upon the figure on the bed ahead of them.

"It's here! It's here!" he whispered, shrilly. "Oh, sir, let us go no further. I cannot go past that bed. Let me out, sir! You must let me go out. There is discord; the harmony is broken; there is a false tone that shakes me, sir!"

When Nick let him go, he hastened back to the door of the ward. The surprised Brother looked around, and Nick touched his arm.

"Do you know the nature of the trouble with the person lying here?" the detective asked, pointing to the still figure on the bed.

The Brother started, stared a moment from under his cowl at Nick, and then bowed silently.

"Is it a gunshot wound—an old one that has broken open afresh?"

"It was a gunshot wound—and a fall," murmured the Brother.

"And he was brought here early this morning?"

The Brother bowed slowly again. Nick's voice could not but betray some eagerness when he spoke again.

"It is as I thought!" he cried. "That man——"

"Is dead. He passed away quite an hour ago, sir," said the Brother softly. "Here come the attendants now to remove him from the ward."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET TRUST REVEALED.

Seldom had Nick Carter been so surprised by a turn of events. It was not that his quest had failed; his reasoning had been proven true, indeed, beyond peradventure. But the end had been entirely unexpected.

His first thought really was that again Bob Spale might escape him, and he demanded to see the face of the dead man.

"Look," said the Brother gravely, and turned back the cowl. The lean, brown, haggard face of the black sheep of the Spale family—the man who lived for years

in the wilderness, with wild beasts, and had followed half a dozen perilous trades in his life—was revealed. There could be no mistake about it.

"How did it happen?" asked Nick slowly, standing aside with his guide, while the Brothers lifted the body from the bed to the stretcher.

"An internal hemorrhage. The old wound in his chest had been torn open. We were informed by the man who brought him here that he had fallen some thirty feet. His foot and arm were bruised, too."

"He weakened going down that airshaft at Meyer's hotel at last," muttered Nick. Then, aloud, he said: "Well?"

"We did not know how serious the case might be. The internal hemorrhage was unexpected. He died quietly, and without a word. Let us hope he was prepared."

It was not the detective's business to disabuse the kind old man of this hope; they went back to the corridor, and the Brother said:

"Your companion is much shaken by all this—do you see? He is a man in need of what we have to offer here, sir. He needs the peace that this retreat offers. May I invite him to remain for a time?"

"I believe it would be a charitable thing if you did so!" declared Nick warmly. "He is practically homeless, I understand. And you can see yourself that he is not altogether as other men are."

"But simple, and kindly of temper," said the Brother. "I will broach it to him."

Half an hour later the detective left the retreat, knowing that he had been the means of placing Professor Mahoney in the best of hands. He had likewise assured the Brother that he would communicate with people who would remove the body of Bob Spale from their care.

As far as Patsy and Danny felt, the matter had ended tamely enough. They expected, if Bob Spale was apprehended, that the man would put up a vigorous fight.

The death of the assassin ended the case abruptly. There was nobody to punish for the death of Herman Spale, and the police would, of course, drop the prosecution of Whittling Johnny and his sister for helping Bob escape from the Tombs prison.

As for Doctor Beebee, there was absolutely no way of connecting the vivisectionist with the second escape of Bob Spale. Later, they learned that the cold-blooded surgeon had gone to the tenement house where Bob had been confined, and by virtue of his bill of sale, demanded possession of the live ourang.

The police, uncertain how to care for the horrid beast, gave him up rather willingly, and the doctor drove away with him in a cab. He seemed to possess the same power over the beast that Bob himself had.

Whether the ourang went into the doctor's laboratory behind his house, never to come out again alive, is a question with which we have no care. But Beebee was a man whom Nick Carter put on his "suspected" list.

"A person of such cruelty is bound to do something sometime to bring him under the eye of the law," was the astute detective's remark.

Whittling Johnny and his lame sister disappeared, after the police forgot about them. Nick always suspected that Adelina, out of the kindness of her heart, helped the lame girl and her unfortunate brother, to get out of the city and start a new life elsewhere.

As for Emanuel Finowitz, the lawyer, who had taken up Bob Spale's case, quite evidently for what there might be in it for him, he was scared into keeping very quiet after Bob's sudden and unexpected death. He did not pursue his inquiries further as to the secret trust that had been attached to the will of old John Spale, father of the murdered Herman.

"But the trust still edges *my* curiosity, Mr. Meyer," admitted Nick Carter, when he thrashed out the whole report before the little attorney and executor of the great Spale estate. "I'd like to know what the instructions were that the old man left to his son, and his son never called for—and whether the trust related in any way to Bob Spale."

Meyer looked at him with twinkling eyes and a flush rising under the rouge on his withered cheeks.

"I declare, Mr. Carter, I like to see you show common traits with other human beings. Curiosity is a vulgar emotion."

"I admit it," laughed Nick.

"Well, then, I will satisfy it."

"You have opened the sealed packet?" cried Nick.

"I told you I did not care to do so while Bob was alive, at least. Now, as far as I have any knowledge, there is not a living representative of the Spale family—not an heir of blood. So I have done so. And, here are the instructions."

He spread the closely written paper before the detective. Briefly, it did relate to the missing Robert Spale, whom the father of Herman had never believed was dead.

Herman in his miserliness, would not ask for these instructions, fearing that they would entail some expenditure of his precious money for Bob's benefit; but he might have saved himself all those troublesome thoughts.

Had Bob Spale returned from his wanderings and shown himself industrious, and without the blemishes of character which he had possessed as a boy, he was to have received an annuity of five thousand dollars from his relative's estate. But only with the proviso that Herman was satisfied that his uncle was "of good moral character!"

"It was a joke on Herman," said Meyer grimly. "I hope he is where he can enjoy the point."

Which rather irreverent remark closed the case and the interest it had for Nick Carter.

THE END.

The next number (668) will contain "The Broken Latch; or, Nick Carter's Single Clue."

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THE SEA OTTER.

He is a far bigger fellow than the sleek brown fish poacher who haunts our streams. He is rarer, too, and his pelt is worth tenfold more in the fur markets of the world. Therefore he is a "much-wanted" animal, and the pursuit of him is a calling which demands such courage and hardihood and unwearying patience that, however much we may hate and deplore the killing of so beautiful a creature, we cannot but admire the pluck of the men who go after him.

The kalan, or sea otter, is about twice the size of our riverside friend, and many specimens scale as much as seventy-five pounds in weight. Like all his tribe, he is long of body and short of limb, and in his case the peculiarity of a very short tail—sometimes not more than seven inches—is added. His hind feet are broad and palmated; his fore paws are small by comparison.

But it is the skin that is the chief thing about a sea otter. Of all fur-clad animals he, perhaps, wears the loveliest coat. If ever you come across one, run your fingers through the fur and see how deep, and rich, and beautifully soft it is. Look at it, too, in a good light, and note the glossy, velvet-like sheen upon it. You will then hardly be surprised that those who can afford it eagerly buy such a skin.

Usually the color is a rich black, with a tinge of brown on the upper parts of the back. On the under parts of the body it shades off to a much lighter hue. Some specimens have nearly white heads.

Alaska is the region where the sea otter is now mostly to be found. This great corner piece, on the left-hand top corner of the map of North America, was once Russian territory. In those days, although the fur was much prized in the Czar's dominions, only some three or found hundred pelts were annually brought to market. But in 1867 the United States purchased Alaska, and then American business "push" made itself felt in the dreary regions given over to the hunter and the trapper. The jingling of the dollars—or, more probably, the coveted articles held out in barter—by the white trader stimulated the native hunter to redoubled efforts.

Then began a bad time for the kalan. Once he was safe if he chose for refuge the more dangerous coasts. Now, tempted by what the white trader man was prepared to offer, even those places were not a safe sanctuary. Round the surf-beaten headland, with its icy fringe, came gliding the long narrow canoe which he knew well held death for him and his tribe. And unless he took care very speedily to vanish into cave or inlet, or dive and swim into still more dangerous waters, the light, swift harpoon would come whistling out, and—good by to life and the Alaskan shore!

Back in eighteenth-century days his fellows swam and played on many a coast and rocky islet as far south almost as California. But the demand for the glossy fur became so keen that they were gradually killed off in the more easily got at places, and now the hunter who would find one must go into the inhospitable region of the Aleutian Archipelago, away in that bleak and bitter Northwest.

In 1889 an American paper stated that, despite the keen search, only some four thousand skins were put on the market. And only the other day Mr. Charles Mühlberg, writing in *Nature Notes*, stated that "whereas in 1897 over one thousand two hundred pelts were sent to the London market, in 1904 less than four hundred were received."

These figures tell a piteous tale, and unless the American government interferes to protect him from his plucky but relentless persecutors, the fate of the sea otter will be that of the great auk—whose feathered armies once dotted the Atlantic coast of the same continent, and of which at the present day not one remains.

Meanwhile nature is doing her best for this poor hunted child of hers by making it as difficult and dangerous as she can for the frail craft of the otter hunter to intrude on this, the kalan's last home. She weaves her sea fogs to baffle the men who seek his life. Or she sends the tempest shrieking in, hurling before it the icy waves, till every deadly reef is drowned and hidden in white leaping foam.

And yet to this inhospitable and terror-laden strand comes, in spite of all, the hunter of the sea otter. He will not be denied. His weapons are not of the best, but he knows exactly how to wield them. His bark is so frail that to jar on one ragged splinter of rock would spell shipwreck, but he handles her with the most amazing dexterity. If any hunter deserves to succeed, the otter hunter does.

Let us, then, see what manner of men these are.

Almost entirely they are natives of the Aleutian Islands, or of the Alaskan shore, and Kadiak Island. In face they are of the Mongolian type: you might almost take them for Japanese, whom they resemble in their short stature as well as in a certain quiet, teachable demeanor. Tough fellows they are, it goes without saying, short, thick-set, sturdy, and of astonishing pluck and endurance.

Their settlements are dotted along the coast, and each has its church or chapel, for in name at least they have been Christian since the coming among them of Russian missionary priests. That was about the time of the American War of Independence. But morals and manners are both somewhat primitive. Only the more well-to-do inhabitants live in wooden cottages; the rest are content with the "dug-out" in which their forefathers were reared and bred.

The best hunting grounds are those of Soonak; fifty per cent. of the Alaskan otter skins, one might fairly reckon, come from that part. Soonak is an island, with a backbone of rock rising to some eight hundred feet in height, the flanks of which are water-logged moorland, the resort of wild fowl. For miles along the beach the waves have piled up stones and bowlders, some of the latter enormous in size; and from the southern and western shores a series of reefs jut out to a great distance, only bare at low water. And here, where the surf runs frothing in and out of the rocks, and great matted flotillas of wrack and kelp lift and fall to

the swell, the poor harassed kalan lives and feeds, and plays and sleeps, and here also too often he finds his death.

Later the winter storms drive him shoreward. Then is the hunter's opportunity, and thither he repairs in his frail canoe.

He crosses the intervening patch of sea, and camps on the island. It is dreary and comfortless camping, however. Very often no food can be cooked—that is, if the wind is not blowing in a perfectly safe direction—for the smell of a wood fire would speedily tell its story to every otter in the neighborhood. So the cooking pots may be brought back unused from a jaunt such as this, and if fingers or toes get frozen they must be thawed in some other way than warming them at a ruddy blaze.

Few, very few, white men undertake the work; but they assist the actual workers by conveying them in their little schooners to the hunting grounds. This is not only a great saving of time, but it also means a very real lessening of risk, as the frail fleet often used to encounter perils from storms and fogs on what to such small craft was a considerable journey. Moreover, the agents are always at hand, keeping the natives "up to the collar," and a good take is generally promptly followed by purchase and payment.

Years ago the old primitive hunting weapons were reckoned enough for the capture of the otter, but nowadays the competition among the hunters is so keen that the best patterns of breech-loading rifles are being eagerly obtained. And it is safe to predict that, as has been said before, unless protected by government, the sea otter will ere long be exterminated. For, as one writer frankly tells us, "as matters are now conducted, the sea otters in Alaska do not have a day's rest during the whole year."

It is the ambition of every adventurous boy in the Aleutian villages to become an otter hunter. But he has to "win his spurs" as hardly as any young esquire in the ancient days of chivalry.

Before the men will admit him to their circle he must prove himself worthy. He must show that he has learned how to handle his bidarka in a cross sea, he must show that he can find his way home when the sea fog drops like a cloud, that he can throw the harpoon or fire his rifle with enough precision to make him a reliable member of any expedition. For in a concerted movement one bungler may spoil the labor of all.

Like the young Spartan of old and the young redskin of more modern times, he must steel himself to endure the extremes of cold, and discomfort, and fatigue. As we say, he must "learn to have no feelings." He must innure himself to sit rocking in his canoe for hours as still as if he and the canoe were one. He must be able, when his prey appears, so to control his excitement that he will be able to let seeming chances slip by in order not to spoil the one golden chance when the supreme moment comes. He must be as wiry as the sleek beast he is after, and as tough as the wood of his paddle. He must be capable of great exertion and great endurance, not only when he has had sufficient food, but also when no meal has been possible.

Truly, it is hard to say which has the roughest time of it, the poor harassed otter or the patient, weather-beaten seafarer who waits, and watches, and dares everything to take his life.

A sea otter hunting party often consists of as many as fifty men, though small parties of a dozen are not uncommon. But the larger number lends itself better to the favorite method of hunting. This is the "surround."

Let us follow the course of action of one such hunting party.

The schooner has discharged her freight, and is heading out to sea once more. She has "dropped" the piled-up bidarkas, one by one, in some quiet creek or harbor, the owners have dropped into them, and adieus are waved. Schooner's crew and hunter passengers will not see each other again for some six weeks, perhaps twelve. Then the schooner will come in sight once more, pick up the hunting party and their canoes, and bear them back to the settlement.

A rough tent is erected on the shore. Some one is chosen to be storekeeper, and the food supplies are housed with all care. For, except for fish and the not too abundant sea fowl, no provisions are obtainable beyond those that have been brought, and these are frugal enough.

If the expedition is a big one, there will be more than one fleet of fifteen or twenty bidarkas, with two men, as a rule, to each boat. At earliest dawn, the men rouse themselves from their sleeping quarters and put out to sea. The line lengthens out till nearly a mile of water is being watched by the chain of boats. Suddenly the bright eye and sleek, wet head of an otter lifts itself for an instant to scan the strange beings that come bobbing over the sea in the dim light. The next moment he has dived, but the nearest man has seen him. He makes for the exact spot where the animal was last seen, and then he and his mate or mates silently lift their paddles as high as they can.

The signal is quickly caught. In a very few minutes their boat is in the centre of a great circle. Somewhere within that circle the otter will rise to take breath.

Suddenly up he comes. There is a wild cry from a bidarka close by, and a spear whizzes toward him. It misses, but the poor beast has been badly scared, and he has dived again. This time he has not taken full breath, and it will be only a very short time before he has to rise once more. He comes again to the surface, and this time the harpoon flies true. Panting and struggling violently, the otter is drawn in toward the lucky hunter. The bright eye flashes, the white teeth gleam threateningly, and woe betide any hand stretched out to seize him.

But the captor knows this, and a vicious blow from his wooden club stuns, and a second one slays outright, the kalan floundering alongside his bidarka.

There is a trace of the savage in the Aleutian hunter, and the savage is ever superstitious. The sea otter hunter has his own tribal fears and fancies. One is that he can propitiate fate by biting off the blunt tip of the dead otter's nose. This he does; then, stowing the precious prize safely away, he and his mates "fall into line" once more, and the hunting is resumed.

This goes on till dusk, which often finds the party far from "home." A cheerless bivouac among the rocks of the nearest beach is then made, each man huddling under the lee of his upturned boat, and sport is again in full swing before the waters feel the morrow's sun.

Often, indeed, there is no sun to be seen—for days together. For this kind of hunting is of no use except in the winter. The storm that imperils the frail bidarka makes it easy to approach the otter, and the most desperate risks are run by the boldest hunters.

Some of them deliberately commit themselves to the mercy of the winds and waves, scudding before the gale and letting it carry them over to the foam-drenched rocks, where, among the seaweed, the coveted black heads are most numerous. The noise of the surf drowns all lesser sounds, and half a dozen otters may be stealthily overtaken and slain before the rest of the scattered group take flight and flee.

If calmer weather prevails, the fleet will actually venture out as much as fifty or sixty miles from land, and seek the kalan where, on the great floating rafts of matted seaweed, he and his family frolic and play unsuspectingly.

At such places the hunter will often use the net with surprising success. It is said that as soon as the kalan finds himself even slightly entangled in the meshes he becomes cowed and unnerved, and seldom makes any attempt to break away, as he easily might do.

The sea otter is often shot by young Aleuts prowling, gun in hand, along the cliffs overlooking their nearer haunts. But that is poor sport compared with the chase of the otter in mid-sea or among the roar and swirl of maddened breakers driven in against the pitiless rocks.

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